

F1 British GP gets Friday evening qualifying

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20 MAY 2021

WHY I CAN STILL WIN A THIRD F1 TITLE

Despite tricky start with Alpine, the returning champ has his eyes on 2022 – and beyond

F1 2021 SEASON

'This is a year for preparation'

NEW RULES

'Hopefully there will be very close action between many teams'

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Alonso's search for that elusive third F1 crown continues

He's one of the greatest drivers ever to have sat in a racing car, but is Fernando Alonso still capable of landing that third Formula 1 world title he has coveted for so long (14 years and counting)?

His tricky start to the 2021 campaign with Alpine has raised some question marks but, as the Spaniard tells Alex Kalinauckas in our cover interview on page 16, it's far too early to know where Alonso really stands. Even drivers that have *just* changed teams have found it hard enough to adapt, and Alonso has had two years out of F1.

It seems only fair and sensible to give Alonso more time, and to suggest that Alpine's progress and the state of F1 following the rule changes for 2022 will have a bigger impact on how realistic his aim is.

Alonso also talks of his chances *after* 2022, indicating that he is committed for the long term. With so many young talents on the grid, Alonso may never get another title chance, but wouldn't it be wonderful if we finally got to see what has been F1's big lost rivalry of the century so far: Alonso versus Lewis Hamilton?

- Our bumper National section kicks off this week with previews of the British GT (p47) and BRDC British Formula 3 Championships (p52), which get under way at Brands Hatch this weekend. James Newbold and Stefan Mackley are your guides.



Kevin Turner

Kevin Turner
Chief Editor

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**NEXT WEEK
27 MAY**

Monaco GP magic
Can Verstappen regain
ground on Hamilton on
the famous streets?



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IMAGES**

James Moy/
Alpine

PIT & Paddock

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British GP qualifying last climaxed on a Friday in 1983, when Rene Arnoux took pole for Ferrari

FRIDAY EVENING QUALIFYING FOR

FORMULA 1

Qualifying for July's British Grand Prix will be run on Friday evening as part of Formula 1's format shake-up for the Silverstone race weekend.

F1 will hold its first 100km sprint race on the Saturday of the 16-18 July event to set the grid for the Grand Prix on Sunday. The format change meant qualifying at Silverstone would always get bumped to Friday, but now officials have revealed that it will start at 6pm. A single one-hour practice session will be held beforehand at 2.30pm. Teams will then have two and a half hours to prepare for qualifying, the result of which will set the starting grid for the sprint race on Saturday.

The evening qualifying could offer a boost to crowd numbers at Silverstone, allowing spectators to attend after finishing work or school. Sunset will not occur until after 9pm, meaning light conditions are unlikely to have much of an impact, although teams are likely to contend with cooler track conditions than usual.

The schedule shake-up on Saturday means second

practice takes place at noon before the start of 'sprint qualifying' (the sprint race) at 4.30pm. Sunday's British Grand Prix will start one hour later than usual, at 3pm.

The 'sprint qualifying' format is being used at three events this year, with F1 officials also planning to stage the Saturday events at Monza and Interlagos, albeit subject to confirmation. F1 bosses have made clear that the sprint races are very much at a trial stage in 2021, and could either be expanded or removed entirely depending on their success or otherwise this year.

"We are excited by this new opportunity that will bring our fans an even more engaging race weekend in 2021," said F1 CEO Stefano Domenicali. "Seeing the drivers battling it out over three days will be an amazing experience. I am sure the drivers will relish the fight. I am delighted that all the teams supported this plan, and it is a testament to our united efforts to continue to engage our fans in new ways while ensuring we remain committed to the heritage and meritocracy of our sport."

Although Silverstone is yet to confirm its attendance plans amid ongoing discussions with the UK





SUTTON
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IMAGES

BRITISH GP

government as it trials a reduced fan return to sporting events, the track revealed last week that it has added another grandstand at Chapel Curve due to “incredible demand” for tickets.

TURKEY OFF, AUSTRIA DOUBLE, FRANCE MOVE

Just a couple of weeks after adding the Turkish Grand Prix to the 2021 calendar, F1 has been forced to scrap plans to hold a race at Istanbul Park. The event was intended to replace the cancelled Canadian GP on 13 June, but was pulled from the schedule last week due to the UK government’s update to its ‘red list’.

A spike in COVID-19 cases in Turkey prompted lawmakers to enforce a strict 10-day quarantine at a government-approved hotel for those arriving in the UK from the country, making the race unviable given the number of UK-based teams and personnel. A date swap with the preceding weekend’s Azerbaijan GP was discussed, only for Baku to rule out the move due to its Euro 2020 hosting commitments on 12 June.

The knock-on effect is that a second race at Austria’s Red Bull Ring has been added to the schedule, reviving the Styrian Grand Prix title first used last season, while the French GP at Paul Ricard has been brought forward by one week to 20 June. This will be followed by the Styrian GP on 27 June, with the second race at the Red Bull Ring – the Austrian GP – retaining its 4 July date to complete the first triple-header of 2021.

Turkey is officially postponed but not cancelled. A return later in the year is possible should the pandemic force further revisions to the schedule.

LUKE SMITH

PIT + PADDOCK



TEE
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IMAGES

New tests to clamp down on ‘bendy’ rear wings

FORMULA 1

The FIA is to introduce new rear-wing flexibility tests ahead of next month’s French Grand Prix amid concerns that some teams are exploiting the Formula 1 rules.

Questions over the design of the Red Bull rear wing in particular were floated during the recent Spanish GP after Lewis Hamilton suggested its design was “bendy”. The inference was that Red Bull could be exploiting a more flexible wing that rotates down on the straights to boost top speed, but then reverts up into a normal position for the corners to provide maximum downforce.

Red Bull team principal Christian Horner was adamant that the team’s wing design had passed all the current pullback tests used to test the rigidity of the designs, and that the FIA was “completely happy with the car”.

But sources revealed to Autosport last week that the FIA has written to all teams and informed them that it is concerned that teams are exploiting designs that pass the static tests but still flex at speed. In the note, a copy of which has been seen by Autosport, the FIA states that it is aware of designs that comply with the current tests but “nonetheless exhibit excessive deflections while the cars are in motion”.

It adds: “We believe that such deformations can have a significant influence on the car’s

aerodynamic performance.”

In response to its concerns, the FIA has stated that it is to enact a clause in F1’s technical regulations that allows it to introduce new tests. The FIA will focus on the behaviour of wings as they rotate backwards, with the tests set to include limiting the rear wing to just one degree of rotation from an axis normal to the centre plane when two rearward and horizontal 750N loads are applied at a set location. A further test, involving a 1000N vertical and downward force, will similarly allow just one degree of rotation.

The hope is that the tests will clamp down on teams trying to push the boundaries with clever designs that move when out on the track in a way that cannot currently be checked when the car is stationary.

The existing designs will remain unchecked for the next two races, in Monaco and Azerbaijan.

Red Bull advisor Helmut Marko told Autosport that “it’s not just Red Bull being targeted” by the clampdown, suggesting that both Alfa Romeo and Alpine have been spotted with flexing rear wings. “It is certainly not a disadvantage that is decisive for the world championship,” said Marko. “It is quite normal. We had to readjust the front wings two or three times a season during our successful world championship period.”

LUKE SMITH AND
JONATHAN NOBLE



Bump Day back as 35 enter oversubscribed Indy 500

INDIANAPOLIS 500

Bump Day is back on the menu for this weekend at the Indianapolis 500, with 35 entries attracted for the blue-riband IndyCar Series round.

Qualifying for the 30 May race takes place this weekend, with positions 10 to 30 on the traditional 33-car grid locked in on Saturday. The slowest cars on Saturday will then take place in a shootout for the back row on Sunday afternoon, followed by the 'Fast 9' runoffs to determine the first three rows of the field.

The 35th entry came from a new start-up IndyCar team, Top Gun Racing, which will field a car for IndyCar returnee RC Enerson. The team, co-owned by Gary Trout and Bill Throckmorton, had planned to enter the 500 in 2020, but deferred its entry by a year when last year's race was held without fans in attendance.

Top Gun is one of three teams that are joining the IndyCar regulars for the year's biggest event. Sage Karam has been entered by Dreyer & Reinbold Racing for its only confirmed outing of the year, while 2010 rookie of the year Simona de Silvestro returns for the first time since 2015 with the female-crewed Paretta



Autosport entry, which has a technical alliance with Team Penske.

Further additional entries include two-time winner Juan Pablo Montoya in a third Arrow McLaren SP machine, Marco Andretti and Stefan Wilson at Andretti Autosport, Pietro Fittipaldi (Dale Coyne with Rick Ware Racing), Charlie Kimball and JR Hildebrand at AJ Foyt Racing, Conor Daly (Ed Carpenter Racing) and Santino Ferrucci (Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing). Montoya joined the field for last weekend's Indy GP round on the Speedway's road course (above).

HERTA F1 HOPES FADE AS HE COMMITS TO ANDRETTI

IndyCar star Colton Herta (below, left) has extended his contract with Andretti Autosport and principal backer Gainbridge until the end of 2023, appearing to diminish prospects of a forthcoming Formula 1 switch.

The 21-year-old has emerged as one of IndyCar's brightest young talents since graduating from Indy Lights in 2019, and scored his fourth series victory with a dominant run from pole at St Petersburg last month.

That win was lauded by 1978 F1 world champion Mario Andretti as an example of his "Formula 1 quality", with Andretti telling Autosport that he was "pushing like hell" to find Herta an opportunity in F1.

F1 boss Stefano Domenicali revealed earlier this month that the organisation is encouraging teams to look at American drivers to build interest in the country ahead of a second US grand prix joining the calendar in Miami from 2022.

JAMES NEWBOLD

Nasr joins Risi for Le Mans

LE MANS 24 HOURS

Ex-Formula 1 driver and IMSA star Felipe Nasr is heading back to the Le Mans 24 Hours after an absence of two years. The Brazilian has been brought in by the US Risi Competizione squad for its return to the prototype ranks in LMP2 this year.

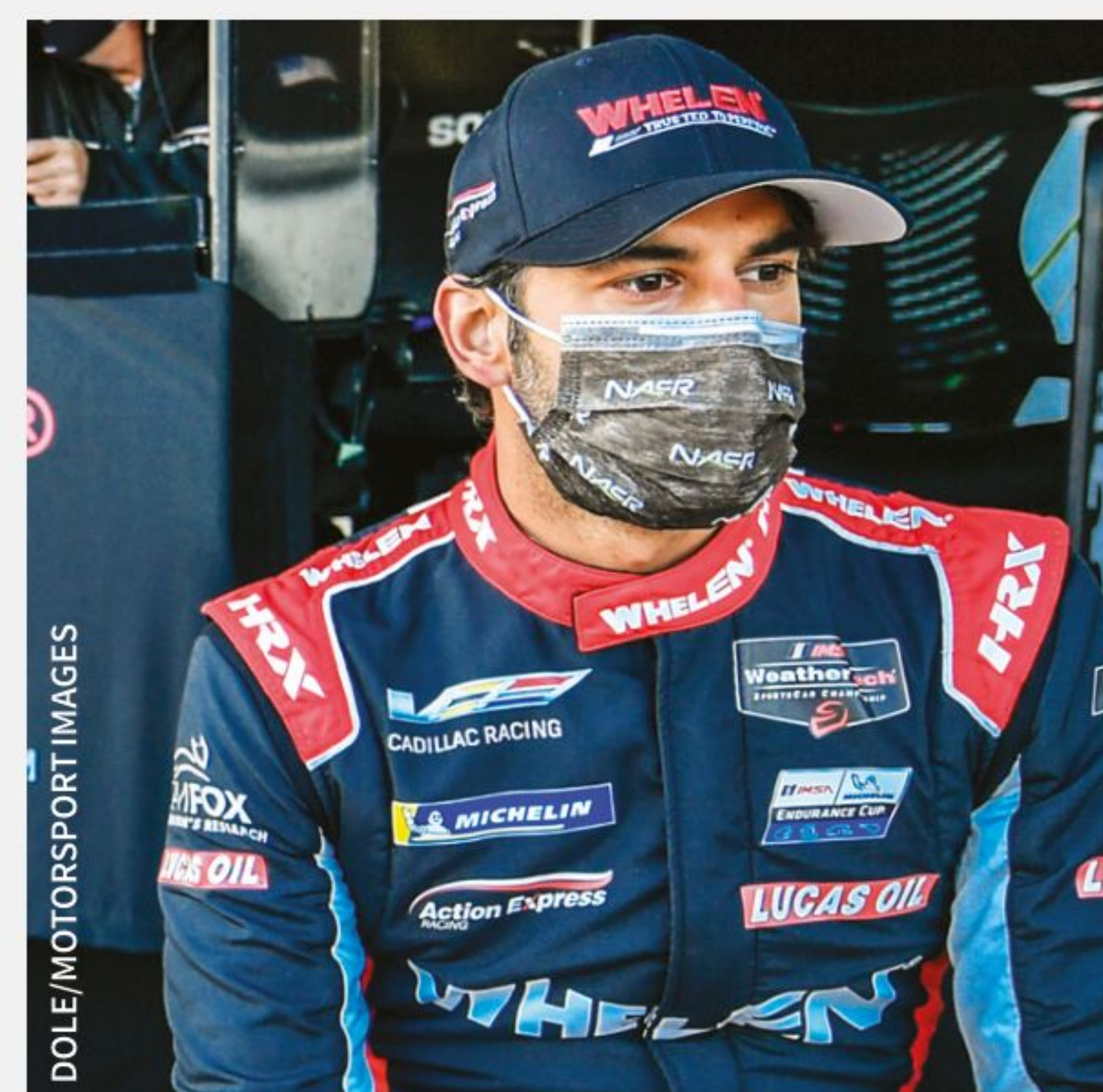
Nasr, the winner of the 2018 IMSA SportsCar Championship with Action Express Racing, will share Ferrari specialist Risi's ORECA-Gibson 07 with Oliver Jarvis and Ryan Cullen in the blue-riband round of the World Endurance Championship on 21-22 August. It will be the former Sauber F1 driver's second Le Mans start after he drove a Villorba Corsa-run Dallara in 2018 alongside a campaign in the European Le Mans Series.

The trio will also race for Houston-based Risi in the WEC round preceding Le Mans at Monza in mid-July by way of preparation.

"Racing at Le Mans never gets old to me," said team boss Giuseppe Risi. "We are pleased to add the Risi Competizione name to LMP2 class history at Le Mans with this year's effort with Ryan, Oliver and Felipe. When the prospect of entering the Monza WEC race became an option, we felt it was an excellent opportunity to have the drivers and crew be able to work together and with the car before such a gruelling race as Le Mans."

Risi won the GT2 class at Le Mans with Ferrari in 2008 and 2009, and also claimed LMP1 honours in 1998 with the Ferrari 333 SP with eighth position overall behind seven GT1 cars. The team claimed victory in the inaugural Petit Le Mans enduro at Road Atlanta with the 333 SP in 1998, and won the SRP11 class with a Lola-Nissan B2K/40 in the 2002 Grand-Am series.

GARY WATKINS





FORMULA 1 The McLarens of Lando Norris and Daniel Ricciardo will contest this weekend's Monaco Grand Prix in a Gulf Oil livery in the wake of the team's renewed tie-up last year with its fuel sponsor. While F1 rules demand that cars appear at each race in 'substantially the same livery', McLaren boss Zak Brown said there had been no problem getting the green light from the FIA and FOM. "They all loved it," he said. "At this point, we only intend to run it at Monaco. If you're going to have a special livery, you keep it special." But is it an homage to the Gulf livery Alessandro Pesenti-Rossi ran on his privateer Tyrrell in 1976?

Porsche and Audi choose Multimatic base car

WEC/IMSA

The new Porsche and Audi LMDh prototypes are being jointly developed in conjunction with Multimatic Motorsports. Their new 2023 contenders for the World Endurance Championship and IMSA SportsCar Championship will be built out of the Canadian operation's forthcoming LMP2 design.

The widely predicted move follows an announcement late last month that there would be 'synergies' between the two programmes, though neither Porsche nor Audi clarified what that would entail.

Multimatic, which also developed the Mazda RT24-P Daytona Prototype international (right), was described by Porsche Motorsport vice-president Fritz

Enzinger as "the most obvious and logical solution for us". Audi had yet to comment on the Multimatic link-up, which was confirmed by Porsche as Autosport went to press on Tuesday. Multimatic boss Larry Holt said the organisation's commitment to the LMDh project was "all-in".

It has yet to be announced whether the two marques will use the same engine in the back of their LMDh hybrids. The rules for the new category allow manufacturers to style in the image of road-going machinery.

The Multimatic news follows the revelation that Porsche will field factory teams in both the WEC and IMSA run by Penske, and in the wake of confirmation from Audi that, like its sister marque, it will make customer cars available from the start.

GARY WATKINS



GALSTAD/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

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Huff returns to the WTCR with Cupra



CUPRA RACING

WORLD TOURING CAR CUP

Rob Huff, the 2012 World Touring Car champion, will return to the FIA World Touring Car Cup this season with the Zengo Motorsport Cupra squad.

Huff participated in the first two seasons of the series' TCR era in 2018 and 2019 at the wheel of a Sebastien Loeb Motorsport-run Volkswagen Golf, but dropped out for 2020 following VW's withdrawal. He switched instead to TCR Scandinavia, and won the title in a Lestrup Racing VW.

In addition to defending that title, Huff has joined Zengo's four-car Cupra Leon

WTCR line-up alongside Spanish veteran Jordi Gene, Cupra hotshoe Mikel Azcona and Hungarian youngster Bence Boldizs.

It means the 41-year-old joins forces again with Cupra parent marque SEAT: his title in the one-make Cupra series in 2003 launched him into the touring car arena in the BTCC with SEAT in 2004.

"I know the Cupra is a competitive car," said Huff. "It shares some of the underpinnings with the Volkswagen I was helping to develop two years ago, and I also spent most of last year fighting against it in Sweden, so it'll be great to be behind the wheel of one instead. It's also great to be

back with Cupra. They launched my career in the UK, and the new car is absolutely a title contender. We know it'll be tough as it's not as though the other manufacturers aren't bringing their A-game either.

"The golden ticket for me at the end is a chance to build on my tally in Macau with a car we know will be able to take us to victory, and add to my 10 wins at the toughest track in the world."

Since the Huff announcement, the WTCR has confirmed a grid for this season of 22 competitors, with action kicking off at the Nurburgring Nordschleife on 4-5 June.

JAMIE KLEIN

Browning and Bearman both on the podium

ITALIAN FORMULA 4

Reigning British Formula 4 champion Luke Browning scored a second place on his continental European debut in the category last weekend at Paul Ricard, matched by fellow Brit Ollie Bearman.

Browning, who will contest the German F4 series with the US Racing team of Gerhard Ungar and Ralf Schumacher, joined a 37-strong field for the

Italian F4 opener. His second place came in race two, behind team-mate and 2020 German F4 rookie title winner Tim Tramnitz.

Bearman has switched from US to Van Amersfoort Racing this year for a dual German/Italian attack. He struggled to get off the line from pole in race two, and likewise from the front row in the third event, in which Tramnitz built up a huge lead while Browning worked

his way past Sebastian Montoya for second.

A late safety car put Browning (right) under pressure from Bearman, who made a pass for second. There was light contact, and Browning dropped to sixth.

Bearman, who was third in the opener, sits third in the points behind Tramnitz and Russian Kirill Smal, who won the first race with Prema Powerteam.

MARCUS SIMMONS



LUKE BROWNING RACING



WRC Hyundai has released pictures of its new Rally1-spec World Rally Championship contender in testing action. The hybrid i20 N was tested for the first time in the south of France last week. “We are starting from scratch with brand-new rules, a different concept and a new base model,” said team boss Andrea Adamo. “It was thrilling to kick off the testing and to start this exciting new adventure.” **Photograph by Hyundai Motorsport**

King on the throne in Austria

CARRERA CUP BENELUX

Reigning Porsche Carrera Cup GB champion Harry King warmed up for his rookie Supercup campaign with a double win in the Carrera Cup Benelux at the Red Bull Ring last weekend.

King, driving for Parker Revs Motorsport, was fifth fastest in qualifying, but started fourth for race one, and was in the lead by Turn 2 on the opening lap. He led all the way to beat Glenn van Parijs by more than four seconds.

King started fourth again for race two, but uncharacteristically took his time in this one, in which he had to wait an entire lap and a bit before taking the lead. This time he beat van Parijs by over 6s.

“I didn’t expect to be on the pace so quickly as there were only the two free practice sessions to dial into the track and we lacked a little bit in qualifying,” said King. “However, when it came to the two races, our pace was really strong and,

when I got into the lead, I was able to stretch my legs and build a gap.

“I’ve been able to learn a lot about the 992-spec car in race trim this weekend ahead of my first start in the Supercup, and now I feel ready to hit the streets of Monaco next weekend.”

Elsewhere in Europe, Nick Yelloly made a fine start to his ADAC GT Masters campaign at Oschersleben, sharing a Schubert Motorsport BMW M6 GT3 with Jesse Krohn. They were fourth in the opener, then fitted slicks mid-race in the follow-up to charge to second from 13th on the grid. SSR Porsche pair Michael Ammermuller and Mathieu Jaminet, winners of race two, lead the points.

In International GT Open at Paul Ricard, Joe Osborne and Nick Moss headed the sister Inception Racing McLaren of Ollie Millroy and Brendan Iribe in a 2-3 in the opener. There were no Brits on the podium in the sequel, but Adam Carroll qualified the Balfe Motorsport Audi on pole.

IN THE HEADLINES

FINNISH MOTOGP OFF AGAIN

The Finnish Grand Prix MotoGP round has been cancelled again. As in 2020, travel restrictions in Finland due to the COVID-19 pandemic have forced the event at the new KymiRing on 11 July to be called off. A second Red Bull Ring event, the Styrian GP, has been added in its place on 8 August. Other COVID casualties in recent days include July’s Toronto IndyCar round, this month’s Suzuka Super GT event, and the June World Rallycross counter at Hell in Norway, which was slated as the series’ opening round.

GLICKENHAUS DEBUT TRIO

Romain Dumas, Ryan Briscoe and Richard Westbrook will race the solo Glickenhaus-Pipo 007LMH in the Portimao 8 Hours round of the World Endurance Championship on 13 June. Paul di Resta has been brought in to replace Filipe Albuquerque, who is racing at the Detroit IMSA event, in the United Autosports ORECA-Gibson 07.

REUTEMANN IMPROVING

Argentinian Formula 1 hero Carlos Reutemann has been moved out of intensive care and into general ward care in hospital in Rosario. The 79-year-old had been suffering from repeated episodes of internal bleeding due to a digestive haemorrhage. Reutemann’s daughter posted a photo of her father sitting on a hospital bed and reading a newspaper.

NOVALAK TOPS F3 TEST

Clement Novalak topped last week’s two-day FIA Formula 3 test at Jerez with the Trident team. Novalak emerged from the second day’s morning session, in which most quick times were set, with an advantage of almost 0.3 seconds over ART Grand Prix’s Frederik Vesti. Enzo Fittipaldi was third with Charouz Racing System, ahead of Novalak’s team-mate Jack Doohan, who led the first day. Teams ran on the medium Pirelli tyre, which will next taste action at the Austrian GP support round.

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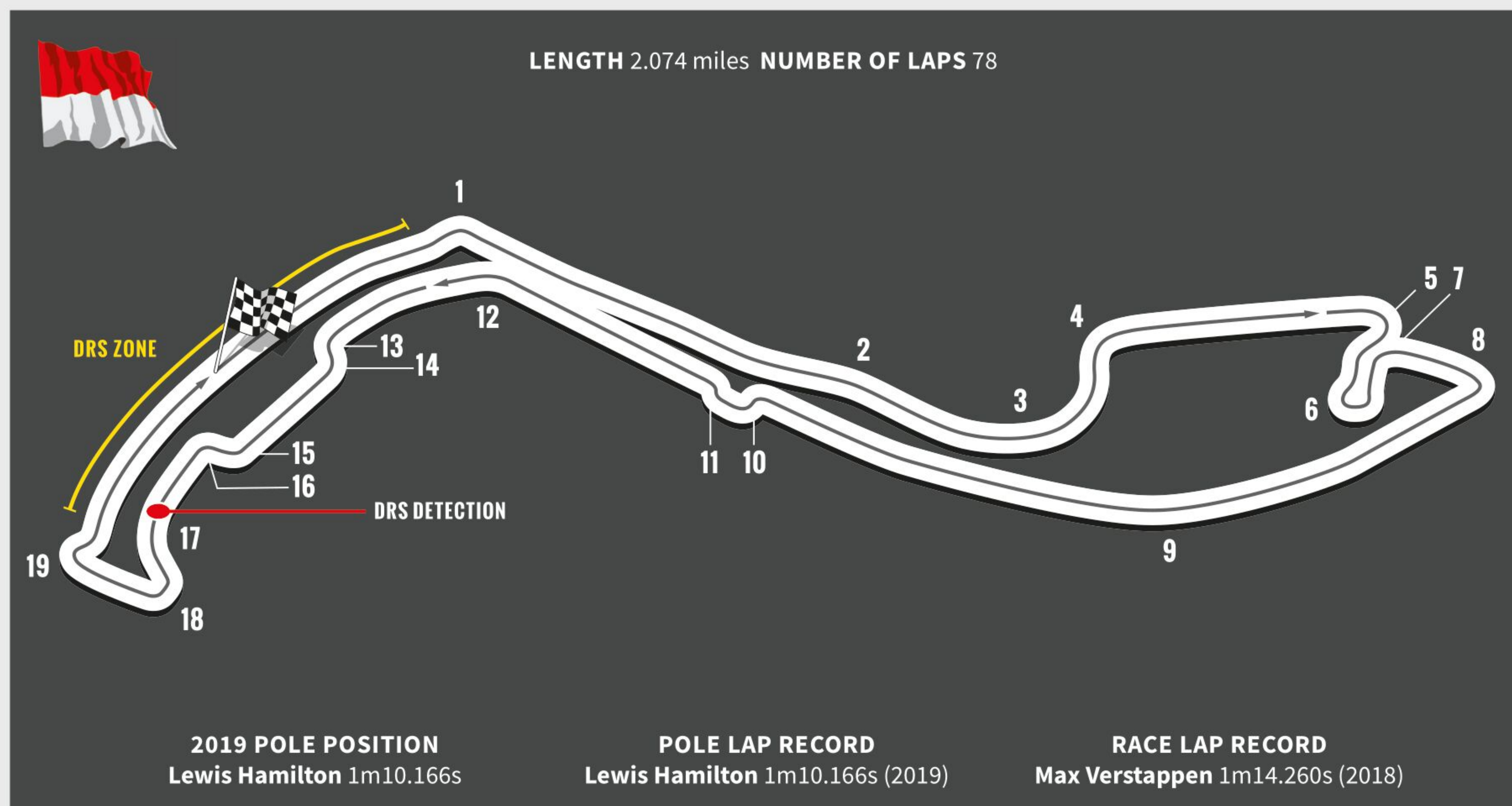
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F1 MONACO GRAND PRIX PREVIEW



UK START TIMES

Thursday 20 May
FP1 1030 FP2 1400

Saturday 22 May
FP3 1100
QUALIFYING 1400

Sunday 23 May
RACE 1400

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TYRE ALLOCATION



CHAMPIONSHIP POSITIONS

Drivers

1	Hamilton	94
2	Verstappen	80
3	Bottas	47
4	Norris	41
5	Leclerc	40

Constructors

1	Mercedes	141
2	Red Bull	112
3	McLaren	65
4	Ferrari	60
5	Alpine	15



RACE STATS

Previous winners

2019	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2018	Daniel Ricciardo	Red Bull
2017	Sebastian Vettel	Ferrari
2016	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2015	Nico Rosberg	Mercedes
2014	Nico Rosberg	Mercedes
2013	Nico Rosberg	Mercedes
2012	Mark Webber	Red Bull
2011	Sebastian Vettel	Red Bull
2010	Mark Webber	Red Bull



Best results

Hamilton	1st x 3
Vettel	1st x 2
Alonso	1st x 2
Raikkonen	1st x 1
Ricciardo	1st x 1
Bottas	3rd x 1
Perez	3rd x 1
Verstappen	4th x 1
Gasly	5th x 1
Sainz	6th x 2

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Time to get rid of a flawed F1 rule

The revival of a point for fastest lap was done with good intentions – and we all know the adage that states where they lead. The concept should be consigned to history

KEVIN TURNER

It's been a flawed concept from the start, but there's now enough evidence to say for sure: Formula 1's point for the fastest lap is a bad idea. Fastest lap statistics have always been fraught; not quite pointless, but requiring lots of caveats.

For example, the fact that arch-rivals Alain Prost and Ayrton Senna scored 41 and 19 fastest laps respectively tells us *something* about their different approaches to a race weekend, but is merely one part of a much bigger picture.

Similarly, Kimi Raikkonen sits third in the all-time fastest laps list. Partly that's thanks to his genuine speed at McLaren, but more than half of his tally of 46 were scored at Ferrari, often late on in races when they were largely irrelevant to the grand prix.

So why did F1 reintroduce the point for fastest lap in 2019, 60 years after it was last part of the championship scoring system?

When the move was announced in March 2019, F1 sporting boss Ross Brawn said: "Together with the FIA we have been committed to evaluating ideas and solutions that can improve the show while maintaining the integrity of our sport. How many times have we heard the drivers on the radio ask the team about who holds the fastest lap? Now it will no longer be only a matter of record and prestige, but there will be a concrete motivation that will make the final part of the race even more interesting."

It wasn't the worst idea in the world, but it was inevitable that

"It was inevitable that it would change the way the teams went about their business"

it would change the way the teams went about their business. And perhaps the most obvious example of that was at the recent Portuguese Grand Prix, when two of the top three made late, extra stops in an effort to secure the bonus point.

Max Verstappen set the quickest lap, only to lose out due to track limits, handing the point to Valtteri Bottas. Leader Lewis Hamilton, who had defeated his two rivals and had recorded the quickest tour until Sergio Perez made his late (but planned) stop, sensibly decided not to risk another tyre change. Pretty much the same thing happened in the Spanish GP a week later.

This is not to criticise those who made those stops. It makes sense for them to chase the extra point if the gaps behind are big enough. But surely one of the F1 ideals is that it's meritocratic.

The fastest lap often doesn't go to the driver who deserves it.

Thanks to the way races evolve and the need to look after the cars in the past, or 'turn them down' now, that's always been the case, but the current situation exacerbates it.

It is sometimes hard to determine when a late stop is purely aimed at gaining the fastest lap, but generally it is possible to make a call. Of the 42 GPs that have been held since the point returned, 16 FLs have been taken by a driver who made a late stop probably for that purpose. And that doesn't count another half a dozen or so set by drivers making late stops for other reasons.

That's not to say that all of the late-stopping fastest lap-setters were undeserving. In the 2020 Hungarian GP, Hamilton was so dominant that he was able to make a late stop, grab fastest lap and still win. But that's the exception rather than the rule.

Both of Pierre Gasly's fastest laps for Red Bull came *because* he wasn't able to keep pace with the frontrunners, but was far enough ahead of the pack to make a stop. In other words, he was rewarded for not doing a very good job.

You could argue that it's simply become another part of the game, but it tends to hinder the drivers most likely to deserve the point. That doesn't seem an entirely fair or pure way to try to keep a championship close, which seems to counter Brawn's point about "integrity".

Only drivers who finish in the top 10 score the point too. Presumably this is to stop those out of the points from stopping and going for the point. But it can also deny genuine fastest lap-setters. Bottas scored a legitimate fastest lap at the 2019 Brazilian GP but then retired, becoming one of only two drivers (the other being Kevin Magnussen in Singapore the same year) since the start of 2019 *not* to get a point, despite the fastest lap on their CV.

And imagine if someone were to lose a race because of a problem experienced during an extra, 'fastest lap' pitstop. Dramatic yes, but what F1 should be about? Highly debatable.

Even worse, though, is that it has the potential to change the outcome of the world championship. Stirling Moss misread his pitboard while dominating the 1958 Portuguese GP. He therefore didn't respond to title rival Mike Hawthorn's fastest lap. At the end of the year, Moss had four wins to Hawthorn's one, but lost the championship by a single point in a result that all but the most diehard Hawthorn fans consider one of the great F1 injustices.

The true test of speed comes in qualifying, for which the reward is a favourable grid position. The elements that are needed for a race victory are much more complex. Fastest laps fall awkwardly between the two.

The point for fastest lap was an interesting experiment. But it doesn't reward those it should, skews the troubled statistic even further, and can create scenes that are more farcical than interesting at the end of a GP. Time for it to go. ❧



Enjoying a new life Stateside

Romain Grosjean is discovering in IndyCar that top-level motorsport is far from incompatible with a chilled, friendly, barbecue-washed-down-with-a-beer lifestyle

CHARLES BRADLEY

Romain Grosjean has a broad smile upon his face as he greets me warmly outside the Dale Coyne Racing with RWR hauler at St Petersburg. “Hello mate, I just did my washing before you arrived,” he grins, racesuit now dangling to dry before IndyCar qualifying. “I didn’t have to do that in F1!”

It’s a stark contrast from the pampered world he used to inhabit, as well as his frustrated demeanour of the past few seasons with Haas, where he scrabbled around putting it all on the line for just a handful of points.

“Formula 1 stays Formula 1,” he says. “I don’t regret spending 10 years there and I know I was very lucky to do what I did. But, coming here, the beauty of IndyCar is that it’s so competitive. I don’t think I’ve been this happy for a very long time.”

Only four months on from the devastating fiery crash that marked an early end to his F1 career, it’s not just the “glad to be alive” sentiment that overrides our conversation, but also his enthusiasm for the new opportunity and environment.

Of course, Haas was far from the biggest team on the F1 grid, yet the Coyne squad’s size is a tiny fraction of that, and its family-like vibe has added to that “breath of fresh air” he needed. Later, as I snap a photo of his car in the line before qualifying, one of his mechanics – with a rag in hand – wisecracks: “Y’know, no matter how hard I polish his car, he *always* brings it back dirty!”

“Ideally, when I finish a race I go and eat a good burger – I can go for it! Life is great”

The harmless quip made me think of the car he didn’t bring back from the 2020 Bahrain Grand Prix, which was left in two semi-large pieces and several hundred small ones. Having faced – and swerved – death in a racing car, it says a lot about Grosjean’s passion for driving that he’s returned to action so soon. Not only that, but with an incredibly positive attitude about an accident that would floor many.

“That crash, in the end, it was a positive thing in my life,” he states. “Yes, my hand is painful and it’s not good looking – I forgot to tape it this morning [in second practice] and I feel so much pain right now! But, at the end, it made me realise that life is beautiful, how lucky I am to have my three kids and my wife. Every day is a bonus.”

I can see why he’s enjoying this new life after F1, and his

enthusiasm reminds me very much of the rising teenaged star that I first met in 2006 when I covered the F3 Euro Series for Autosport.

Around that time, I used to join the young French Federation-backed drivers on their fitness camps in Dubai, nominally to interview them in English to help their media development, although mostly it was lounging around by the swimming pool with team captain Jean Alesi and shouting encouragement and/or giggling as they flogged themselves into a sweaty mess. Romain was always very much the ‘leader of the gang’ on these trips – for example, kissing a camel for a dare!

Freed from the stifling F1 paddock, endless debriefs plus constant media and sponsor demands, the laid-back IndyCar Series is very much an atmosphere that suits him.

“Obviously I take this very seriously,” he says of his new Stateside career. “But if I want a beer in the evening before race day, I’ll have one now. I enjoy my life. I have a good barbecue, I get some chill time in the evening, go to sleep, then I wake up on race day and focus, then it’s boom, boom, boom.”

“I’m still quite fit – I think I burn more calories driving an IndyCar than I ever did in F1. Ideally, when I finish a race I go and eat a good burger – I can go for it! Life is great. I’m enjoying it as much as I can as a human being. I’m lucky to be doing what I love the most.”

“It’s a lot of fresh air for me. OK, it’s not Formula 1 where one driver is paid \$50million a year – you could run all the IndyCars here inside the budget for one F1 team. But the racing is really good, and there’s a nice atmosphere between the drivers. And you get out on track and [he rubs his hands together] let’s do it!”

As well as his own integration into the US lifestyle, Grosjean has been introducing his family to it. A lengthy pre-season road trip along the east coast of Florida with the wife and kids before the season opener was a huge success, and perhaps one day they’ll make the move as a collective if his ambitions to become a full-time driver in the States work out.

Of course, if that’s as an IndyCar driver, that would have to include superspeedway racing. And that’s currently off the agenda. “If I was 25 and didn’t have kids, no problem,” he says. “The thing that’s difficult for now is that my family is far away. If anything happens, that’s a big one... and they are sitting 10 hours’ flight time away.”

“They saw what happened in Bahrain, and for 2m43s they didn’t know if they still had a father or husband. I can’t put them in that situation. So, it’s not for me, it’s for them.” ❧

 **P34 INDYCAR REPORT**



Restricted development

Giuliano Alesi found the European single-seater path limited his chances to race. Now he's flourishing, and winning, in the freer atmosphere of Japan

JAMIE KLEIN

There was a nice piece of historical symmetry to Giuliano Alesi's unexpected victory at a rain-soaked Autopolis last weekend in just his second Super Formula start. Exactly a decade earlier, Kazuki Nakajima – the driver Alesi is standing in for – had done the same thing: he took a first win at only the second time of asking, with TOM'S at Autopolis in the wet.

The difference is, of course, that Nakajima was already a veteran rebuilding his career in Japan after seeing his Formula 1 dreams crumble as a result of Toyota's withdrawal from the championship. Alesi, on the other hand, was the youngest driver in the field at Autopolis, and one with a relatively modest CV, the highlights of which are four sprint race wins across three seasons of GP3 and a smattering of minor F2 points finishes. Indeed, TOM'S boss Nobuhide Tachi admitted in his post-race press conference at Autopolis that he wasn't sure whether Alesi was ready for a full-time Super Formula gig as early as this year. Instead he chose to offer him the chance to prove himself first in Super Formula Lights (what used to be known, until the end of 2019, as All-Japan Formula 3).

But Nakajima's absence from the Suzuka and Autopolis rounds owing to his World Endurance Championship commitments with Toyota and Japan's strict quarantine rules, which also prevent any high-profile outsiders from entering the country, gave TOM'S

“When you don't have experience, good teams in Europe won't risk taking you”

little choice but to give Alesi a go in the big league. Alesi's triumph prompted Tachi to say: “I thought it would take him a while to grow, so I wanted to take the time to nurture him from Super Formula Lights, but I feel like it's OK [for him to race in Super Formula full-time] soon. Now I'm wondering what to do about Kazuki...”

There was talk over the winter in the paddock that Alesi might move directly to Super Formula, given Nick Cassidy's departure from the series and Nakajima's likely WEC scheduling headaches. But when asked if his Autopolis win makes him wish he had found a way to jump into the senior category, Alesi's response was an interesting one. “I don't think I would have been as ready as I am today if I didn't do Super Formula Lights,” he said. “Coming from F2, the natural objective is to stay at the same level in terms of

power. But the people I asked didn't recommend starting from Super Formula because there's not a lot of mileage, so in terms of learning it wouldn't have been the best choice.

“I was given the opportunity to do Super Formula Lights with TOM'S, so I took it and decided to treat this year as a learning year, because I've only ever been in categories where you don't have a lot of mileage, and I've never done more than one championship in a year. I think that really impacted my growth as a driver and my development. Almost all of the young drivers in Formula 1, or the top drivers in F2, they have all done a huge amount of testing, and raced in at least two championships a season. When you have that it really helps you grow as a driver, and that really had an impact when I arrived in F2.”

Alesi certainly raises an interesting point. By the time he reached F2 in 2019, he had only done four seasons in car racing up to that point, one in French F4 (21 races) and three in GP3 (a total of 48 races). Throw in four MRF Challenge races before making his GP3 debut in 2016, and that gives a pre-F2 total of 73 races in cars. By comparison, George Russell had done 120 races, Lando Norris 142 and Mick Schumacher 146 before making their respective F2 bows, with all of them having raced in European Formula 3. That's not to make excuses for Alesi's lack of results but, combined with his Autopolis success, it certainly puts a fresh perspective on his record in Europe.

“Even before F3, those guys were doing two championships a season, in F4, Formula Renault...” he said. “When you do that, they still call you a rookie when you arrive in F2 but you've almost got as much mileage as Lewis Hamilton, compared to someone like me, who did seven race weekends of French F4 and then eight race weekends of GP3 for three years. It doesn't put you in a good situation in terms of finding a good team. When you don't have experience, good teams in Europe will never risk taking you, unless you have an unlimited budget or you are managed by one of the F1 team managers. I think coming to Japan was the best choice I could have made, and it's easy to say now, but I should have come here sooner. I don't think I should have even done F2.”

How many more Super Formula races Alesi will do this season depends on the vagaries of Nakajima's WEC schedule, but for now the 21-year-old is simply grateful even to be able to race in Super Formula Lights after running out of opportunities in the F2 paddock. “After the race, I told [Tachi] he's like my Japanese father, because he took me under his wing,” said Alesi. “He took a risk because my results were not good in Europe. He believed in me when nobody else did, except my family and friends. For that I'll always be grateful.”

P39 SUPER FORMULA REPORT

ALONSO

**ON FORMULA 1,
HIS RETURN AND
WHY YOU CAN'T
WRITE HIM OFF
JUST YET...**

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY ALPINE AND  **motorsport
IMAGES**



500

**“WE’RE WAITING
AND HOPING FOR
REVOLUTION IN 2022.
THAT’S WHAT WE
ALL WANT”**



FORMULA 1 IS BETTER OFF HAVING FERNANDO ALONSO INVOLVED. THE DOUBLE WORLD CHAMPION HAS STILL GOT IT.

And his legend continues, after a period of years in which he has added sporting tales that few of his grand prix racing peers can match. Yes, Alonso is still a driver worth listening to. Thanks to his time racing IndyCars, sportscars and off-road machines, he's perhaps uniquely placed to comment on modern motorsport – which, of course, he's not afraid to do.

There's naturally a debate to be had about ageing superstars retaining a place in motorsport's top tier, when these days so many young drivers never reach it (although perhaps not so much in 2021, a year in which three rookies have progressed from Formula 2). But Alonso's star status is unwavering, even as he continues one of F1's hardest tasks: making a successful comeback with Alpine.

What Alonso is trying to do, and what he brings to F1 just by being him, demonstrates his worth to the championship. Because of who he is, people pay attention – and well they might.

"It's a challenge," he says of his F1 return. "And it's a challenge this year also because of the midfield timing. Normally, it has been a challenge. But your team or your position was quite defined. A supreme weekend doing 105 per cent, or a bad weekend performing 90 per cent, normally you can be between ninth or 11th. While this year, with the midfield as it is, you can be seventh or 15th, [with a difference of just] 0.2 seconds, if you don't perform perfectly right. We need to go for that perfection every weekend."

Autosport is part of a small group of media speaking to Alonso ahead of his first home F1 race since 2018 – the recent Spanish

Grand Prix. It's something of a 'classic' Alonso media meeting – there's self-aggrandisement, withering assessment of the media itself, the barest hint of point-scoring against one of his former teams. But, of course, there's fascinating substance too, offered by an experienced and engaging character.

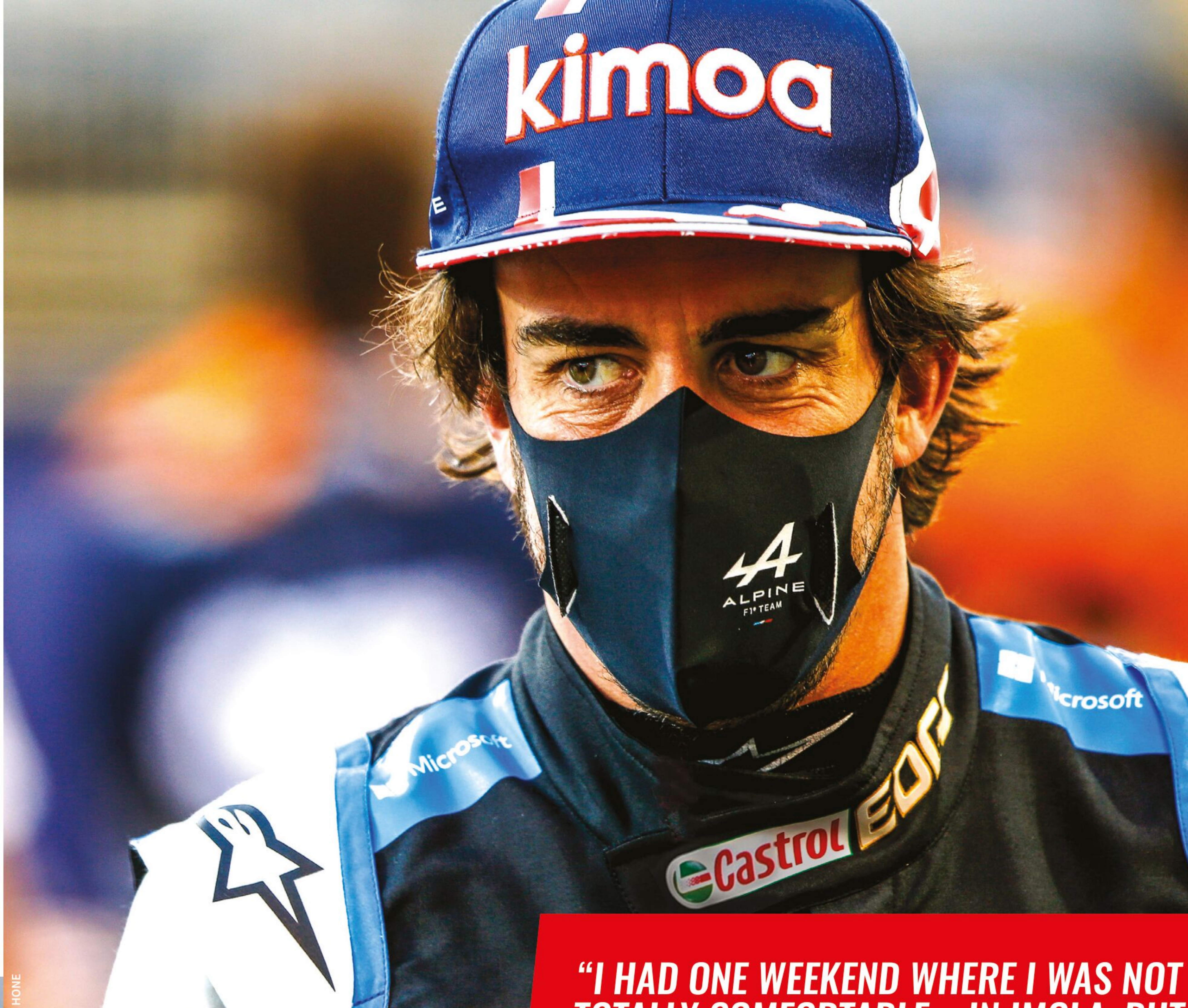
In the race at Barcelona, Alonso came home 17th – the worst result of his comeback so far. But that doesn't tell the real story.

His 2021 got off to a difficult start. Alonso missed Alpine's rebranding pre-season launch event after being hit by a car while cycling. He suffered a fractured jaw and had to have a pair of titanium plates inserted in surgery following the incident. This, plus the restrictions on travel to the UK at the time, also meant that he was only able to return to Alpine's simulator shortly before the restricted pre-season testing began. At the same time, his Alpine squad was grappling with "a few issues in the windtunnel that slowed us in terms of development", according to team executive director Marcin Budkowski.

The team was struggling with the impact of the tweaked rear floor rules for this year, and it was an issue that was compounded by a hardware problem in the tunnel itself. The knock-on effect for Alpine was that it fell several weeks behind in its pre-season preparations and design development.

In Bahrain testing, the team appeared somewhat understated as it worked to assess how the new aerodynamic rules were working in practice. But it was clear that things weren't looking as promising as





HONE

“I HAD ONE WEEKEND WHERE I WAS NOT TOTALLY COMFORTABLE – IN IMOLA. BUT IT WAS NOT ONLY ME. I’M NOT WORRIED”



MAUGER

they had when 2020 ended, a moment where the former Renault squad was buoyed by its three late-season podiums with Daniel Ricciardo and Esteban Ocon. In the season-opener at the same venue, this translated into no points and the sixth fastest car.

Alonso impressed by making it through to Q3 at that Bahrain event, before retiring due to remarkable bad luck, with a sandwich wrapper trapped in a rear brake duct. But the second race of his comeback was the chaos at Imola, where Alonso qualified at the back of Q2, damaged his front wing going off at Tosa in the pre-race rain, spun in the early moments of the race suspension following the George Russell and Valtteri Bottas crash, and eventually took an on-the-road 11th behind Ocon.

“I had one weekend where I was not totally comfortable – in Imola,” Alonso explains. “And the problem is that in Formula 1 there is a lot of media, a lot of articles, and unfortunately two weeks between races. Because, if it was back to back from Imola to Portugal, there [would have been] much less talk!

“And it was also a coincidence of not only me, but a few other drivers not being totally confident in Imola. Some of them, they changed team this year. And that was a coincidence that induced a lot of talk. But, overall, I’m not overthinking too much of this, not worried too much.”

At the same time, Alpine’s early-season place in the pecking order reinforces the perception that 2021 is all about building to what comes next: F1’s 2022 rules reset. Alonso acknowledges that this is “difficult to say” because “every weekend you are on a race track, you are just a competitive person, and you want to deliver and you want to perform well”. The gladiator element of his >>



Battling with Vettel in Bahrain.
Alonso hopes that more teams
will fight for wins from 2022

SCHLEGELMILCH

SUTTON

legend is, naturally, never weary of battle. “But,” he adds, almost effusively, “on the overall picture, yes, 2021 is preparation year – it’s no doubt. I think everybody on the grid, after the delay of the 2021 rules into 2022, we understood and we accepted that 2021 is a preparation year. It’s a post-COVID season with more or less similar cars of last year. And it’s a season to test things like the sprint races.

“It’s a test season, in a way, for many things. Just waiting and hoping for 2022 not [being] continuation, maybe revolution in 2022. That’s what we will want.”

It’s going to be a while before F1 finds out if that hoped for change becomes a reality – perhaps, as Alonso also suggests,

“I FEEL CAPABLE OF DRIVING BETTER THAN EVER. BUT THAT DOESN’T MEAN THAT YOU DON’T FIND COMEBACK DIFFICULTIES”

maybe even longer than many people are thinking. But, based on the two races that followed the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix, he can at least be pleased by Alpine’s progress. At Imola, the team had finally run its 2021-specification front wing and an updated nose cape. At the Algarve Circuit, Alpine made changes to its diffuser, which it tweaked again for the Barcelona event. Small changes in the grand scheme of things – such is the way in this restricted season for car development – but ones that worked.

Alpine remained the sixth fastest team at Imola, but had closed a whopping 0.458% of the average deficit compared to the fastest laps produced by Mercedes, and effectively matched by Red Bull. In Portugal, that gap crept down by another 0.156%, but at this event Alpine was F1’s fourth-fastest team, a position it held onto in Spain.

Since the Bahrain GP, it has been Ocon grabbing Alpine’s best results. He qualified a brilliant sixth in Portugal, slipping back to finish seventh in the GP as Lando Norris and Charles Leclerc edged ahead in their faster respective McLaren and Ferrari. In Spain, he went one better against the clock, taking fifth on the grid and



MOY/ALPINE

coming very close to a sensational fourth.

In the race last time out, Alpine stuck to the one-stopper most teams had initially tried before adapting to two-stoppers, which left its drivers exposed late on. Ocon fell to ninth by the flag, nearly caught by the charging Pierre Gasly on the final tour. Alonso, meanwhile, was hauled out of his race-long (and just-lost) battle with Aston Martin’s Lance Stroll on the fringes of the points to take a second stop, which resulted in his unrepresentative finishing position. A glance at that 17th place in the history books won’t record how hard Alonso fought Stroll as his medium tyres were giving up, but the zeal was really there.

Following the difficulties of Imola and Alpine’s pre-season struggles, it begs the question as to whether Alonso has felt the need to reassess his own pre-season proclamations that he was driving at his best level, which in turn fed his desire to return to F1 and chase a third world title.

“No,” he replies, inevitably unequivocal. “I’m still thinking the same that I am at one point in my life where I feel good, and I feel capable of driving better than ever. But that doesn’t mean that you don’t find difficulties while entering a new adventure, or in this comeback.”

After sampling the delights of the wider motorsport world in the past four years, Alonso’s comeback contains regular



Last victory came at home
eight years ago during
Alonso's Ferrari spell

questions regarding F1's overall health, as well as the state of the championships he has recently tried (see page 22). This all feeds the Alonso legend. Again, he's worth listening to.

So, with sprint races, Netflix popularity and, perhaps most importantly of all, new financial rules allied to a modest form of performance balancing via design tool allocation usage being introduced to F1, has he returned to a championship that is evolving in a way in which it wasn't before he exited in 2018?

"No, I think it was already in this mood in 2018," Alonso replies. "I think from the arrival of Liberty Media, the sport went into a better knowledge of what the fans needed. What the show means, as a part of the sport itself, and the performance and the engineering wall that is inside F1, we need also to listen to the fans and we need to put on a good show on Sundays. And I think Liberty understood this from day one. They just needed a couple of years to settle down and to produce new ideas.

"The cost cap, the 2022 rules, the sprint races – they are all things that are there just to produce better racing and better entertainment for everybody. So, I'm happy. I'm happy with all the things that I see in the sport. I hope these sprint races are a success this year, and we can even make it better for the future. This year is just a test. Maybe we see things that are good, we see things that are not so good, so maybe there are more small improvements for the future. I think we are all in the same boat. And we are all very [much] trying to help Liberty on this because the benefit of one will be the benefit of everybody."

But for all that is changing about F1, the critical factor will always be results. It's a never-ending tussle between a 'win-now' mentality, grappling with a competition that can take teams and drivers years to perfect, the result of certain moves only fully playing out months or even years down the line.

It's that dancing, almost deceiving, circus that meant questions were put to Alonso in the aftermath of the Imola race about his form and the perception of how challenging an F1 comeback really is. But he's not entertaining such a line of questioning just yet. And this is where >>



“WITH NEW RULES THERE’S ALWAYS ONE TEAM THAT GETS SOMETHING EXTRA, BUT THIS CLOSE COMPETITION WILL COME”

the Alonso legend really comes into play — he’s earned the right to not be written off on the back of a few bad results, and he’s essentially not afraid to say it.

“No, no, I don’t think so,” he says to rebuff rather hasty suggestions that he’s struggling in a way that other drivers who made F1 comebacks did not. “I don’t tend to agree with this, and things are getting bigger than what it is. I was the first to admit that I was not 100 per cent in Imola, and not comfortable, and probably underperforming. But it was one race, and one race that with that underperformance I finished two tenths [actually 0.8s] of a second behind my team-mate! So, you know, it cannot be a big thing.

“At the end of the year, we talk. At the end of the year, if I underperform the whole season, and everything was more difficult than expected, OK, maybe there is a point to really discuss and go deep into the questions of why it is more difficult than previously or something. But, in Bahrain, I was happy and probably overperforming. In Imola, underperforming. We need a couple of races to settle down everything.”

Alonso produced a brilliant late charge in Portugal to take his first on-the-road top-10 finish of his comeback (his 10th at Imola came after Kimi Raikkonen’s post-race penalty), and was battling fiercely in Spain. He’s aware that this weekend’s Monaco GP, where Alpine will adjust his car’s power steering to better suit his preference as another minor tweak to improve the A521, will be a stern test of his progress.

That development is about building speed and confidence again, and it’s a process about which Alonso has been very open so far this season. For instance, he knows his qualifying form since Bahrain has let him down.



Ocon has had an edge so far, but Alonso isn't panicking just yet

Intriguingly, he’s doing his learning again in the F1 spotlight 20 years after it first struck him, with Minardi back in 2001 (as part of a rookie class with Raikkonen at Sauber, Juan Pablo Montoya at Williams and Enrique Bernoldi at Arrows). Now, with all that experience, he can lay out what is different in delivering as a 39-year-old compared to the 19-year-old newcomer.

“First of all, you are more mature now and you are working closer with your team,” Alonso outlines. “You learn, with experience, that all the people around you, all the technicians, they have all the parameters and all the knowledge of helping you how to optimise the performance of the car. How to optimise the tyres, your driving, your braking etc.

“When you come into Formula 1 and you’re young, you listen to everyone, yes, you try to understand what they’re trying to tell you, but then it comes to your instinct of driving — when you close the visor, and you’re just racing hard. Because your background, until that point was only karting and younger formulas, that you have to,

ALONSO ON THE MAJOR MOTORSPORT CATEGORIES

Fernando Alonso returned to Formula 1 after a two-year sabbatical during which he completed something of a motorsport odyssey. The highlights were his pair of Le Mans triumphs as part of a Toyota crew, the World Endurance Championship superseason crown (all alongside Sebastien Buemi

and Kazuki Nakajima), and a 2019 Daytona 24 Hours triumph with Wayne Taylor Racing. And, of course, there were his failed bids to win the Indianapolis 500 and a foray into the Dakar Rally.

When his return with what was then called Renault was announced in July 2020, Alonso made

clear that he had been enticed back to F1 by the feeling that Renault/Alpine would give him the chance to return to the championship’s highest level, with the rules reset coming in 2022.

That goal is his current sole focus, unlike in 2018 when his opening WEC superseason entries were combined with the final year of his second stint at McLaren. Alonso suggests he had plenty of options to race in other categories aside from F1 in 2021, but chose not to.

So, let’s hear modern motorsport’s versatility star explaining precisely why he chose to return to grand prix racing when he did, as well as his thoughts on the categories he left behind...

“Right now, I think, especially after the pandemic, [F1] is the series that is more capable to produce a good show and to produce a good competition. Like, in 2018, when I left, I was very honest with everybody saying that I had better feelings or ideas elsewhere than F1. And I had more attractive challenges in WEC or in Indy or in Dakar than what F1 offered me at that time.



Two Le Mans wins added to Alonso's CV, but he now thinks WEC is in 'transition'



let's say, survive by yourself only. You didn't have that amount of people just helping you. So, you're still driving and feeling like that.

"Then, with time, you still rely on your instinct, yes, but you are driving more as a part of the team and try to optimise things. It's not that you lose the speed, but you are driving in what you believe is the most efficient way of driving the car. And maybe sometimes it's even against your instinct of what you would do if you were alone on track. But, eventually, you understand and you believe and you trust that you are doing the best way for the overall performance."

Alonso has already touched on what will likely be the most crucial point of this latest chapter in his lengthy legend. When the current campaign reaches its conclusion, and Alonso eventually reflects on his first season back in F1, the hoped-for rules reset will finally be right around the corner.

For every team that has trailed in Mercedes' wake these past seven years, next season offers hope of transforming their

competitive circumstances with the dramatically different car designs, to revisit old heights from which some have fallen, and for others to climb to previously unattained levels. (Although, given the ultra-competitive drive at the Black Arrows squad, there's just as much chance that Mercedes makes it two rules resets successfully navigated...)

Alonso now strikes a surprisingly pessimistic tone when considering whether any team will be able to score major success from the start of next season. After all, a relatively minor rule change introduced for 2021 has just significantly shaken the competitive picture between Mercedes and Red Bull, even if the former is still leading the way in 2021 so far.

"In terms of fighting for the championship and other possibilities in 2022, difficult to know," he says. "I think the first year [of new rules], there is always one team that gets something extra when there is a new regulation set, that interprets the rules a little bit different and maybe get an advantage. But, hopefully, after two or three years, that new set of regulations that comes in 2022 will [mean] very close action between many teams and is better for the future."

"I don't know if it will come in 2022, but for sure it will come, this close competition, because I think all the regulations are made to cover as many as possible all the clever things and make all the performance parts of the cars quite standard for everybody, and try to have a better and a closer competition."

While that assessment may be tough to hear for any F1 observers hoping that next season will feature a dramatically different competitive picture across the grid, it does hint at something that should nevertheless please the championship.

Alonso may be holding fast against premature conclusions about the success of his comeback, but he's already looking to the battles to come *after* 2022. If he can reach the results and achievements that made him a legend in the first place, perhaps after scrutinising exactly how he measured up to his own high expectations at the end of comeback year one, then the famous tale will have the thrilling ending that Alonso returned to F1 to capture.

But even if that moment never arrives, the final entries in the tale, which may be a fair few years from being written as things stand, will be worth watching all the same. Because, he's still Fernando Alonso. 🏆



"Now, it is exactly the same point. In 2020, when I made the decision to come back, all the other series were on the table, and I thought that Formula 1 was the best challenge in that moment. And the best competition."

"Even with the pandemic, the teams are still very strong and in good health economically and on performance side to produce fantastic cars and a good show. While some other series, maybe they've been more affected by the pandemic and by the sponsorship [loss] and by everything. This is my feeling."

"Obviously IndyCar did only one race [Barber,



when Alonso was speaking ahead of the Portuguese GP] or two races now with St Petersburg. It felt good and it's always gonna be a nice championship. But maybe I was more attracted by F1."

"Dakar is still one thing that I can do in the future and has no problem of having more years into other categories."

"And WEC, I think it's in a transition period at the moment. With the Hypercar, until all the manufacturers [arrive], and they don't come until 2023, I think it's in a transition period."

"So, I thought that F1 was the best thing on the table. Like it was not in 2018. But, this is obviously only a personal opinion and a personal motivation that drives you to choose the next challenge."

THE TRANSFORMATION THAT PREDATED RENAULT'S TRIUMPH

It's rare for Formula 1 teams to go from back-row fodder to podium challengers in one season, but that's what Benetton did in 2001 as it laid the foundations for title-winning success as Renault

JAMES NEWBOLD

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport**
IMAGES



When Renault returned to Formula 1 as a fully fledged factory team in 2016, it boldly announced its aspirations of becoming a winning force again within five years. There's nothing wrong with showing ambition, but its hopelessly misguided comments made a rod for the team's back and revealed an ignorance of the work involved in lifting the Enstone operation up the grid after years of underinvestment by previous owner Genii Capital.

Now in its latest identity as Alpine, the team remains firmly ensconced in the midfield fight and, despite qualifying heroics from Esteban Ocon in Portugal and Spain, appears unlikely to finish higher than fifth once again. In the final year of the current regulations, it would be prudent to start looking at its design for 2022 in the not-too-distant future. But before writing off the A521 altogether, Renault CEO Luca de Meo and co should take inspiration from another former 'Team Enstone' guise, Benetton, whose transformation from backmarker to on-merit podium finisher in 2001 is one of the more remarkable of modern times.

Of course, it's easier to find gains when the only way is up. Studying the supertimes, based on an average of each team's ultimate pace at each grand prix, Benetton was the ninth-quickest team of 2001. It was slower even than Prost, which went bust at season's end, and 2.915% off the pace of frontrunner Ferrari. But it's not every F1 team that is able to go from paddock laughing stock – then-technical director Mike Gascoyne refers to the Renault-powered B201 as a “dog” – to cracking



Gascoyne (right) credits
Briatore for hiring top talents

the top 10 in qualifying with both cars by the end of the season.

Three podiums from Giancarlo Fisichella – including a second place in Brazil after David Coulthard's McLaren was disqualified – had helped the team to finish fourth in the constructors' standings in 2000, pipping BAR on countback. It represented a return to form for the team after a terrible 1999 campaign in which it had slipped to sixth in the constructors' points – its worst performance since 1986 (during



Fisichella's Spa podium was the bright spot of Benetton's final season

SUTTON



SUTTON

“HAVING A GOOD WINDTUNNEL DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN THAT YOU PUT QUICK RACING CARS IN IT”

technical director Gascoyne into the fold, with Jordan chief designer Mark Smith and deputy technical director Bob Bell following in 2001. “One thing about Flavio, he was very supportive of building up a team to win a world championship,” says Gascoyne, “so people I wanted he was very supportive of getting.”

For Pat Symonds, who had taken over as technical director following the departure of Ross Brawn in 1996 and steered the team through a few lean years, a bright future appeared around the corner. “In the late 1990s, I was technical director and I had a lot on my plate,” he recalls. “We had a tiny budget and an incredibly onerous engine supply contract with Mecachrome which was killing us.

“People talk about engine costs these days, but believe me they were a lot worse then as a percentage of your total budget. It bears no resemblance. We were already bleeding paying those engine bills, and then at the end of the year we’d get another bill because we’ve used more engines in testing than the contract said, so we were really struggling in that respect.

“Number one on my job list every single day was to prepare the team for sale, effectively. I knew we were moving into an era where you had to be aligned with a manufacturer, so I had to make the team attractive to a manufacturer by appearing to be a big team running on a small team budget. That was really tough, but we achieved the objective and Renault had faith that it was a good thing to get into.

“Suddenly there was a lot more money coming in, so the team was able to grow up very rapidly. Our 2000-01 budget compared to our 1998-99 budget was beyond belief and, of course, by 2001 we weren’t really paying for engines either.”

But there was still plenty of work to do, not least debugging the windtunnel and improving the model quality, before the team could begin to have designs on recapturing its glory days of 1994-95. “When I went to Jordan, they were failing because of their aerodynamic programme, and when I went to Benetton it was exactly the same,” says Gascoyne. “They had a much better windtunnel, much bigger facilities, loads more people, but having a good windtunnel doesn’t always >>



Fisichella flattered B201 by qualifying 10th in Monaco

BELLANCA

which it still won a race) — due to a poor correlation with the windtunnel that resulted in key aero deficiencies and supposed innovations proving dead ends (Benetton’s Front Torque Transfer system and twin-clutch gearbox were the chief culprits).

Renault had completed a deal with the Benetton family to buy the team in March 2000, and the return of Flavio Briatore as managing director coincided with an influx of investment that brought ex-Jordan



mean that you put quick racing cars in it. You've still got to design a quick car, and they weren't doing so."

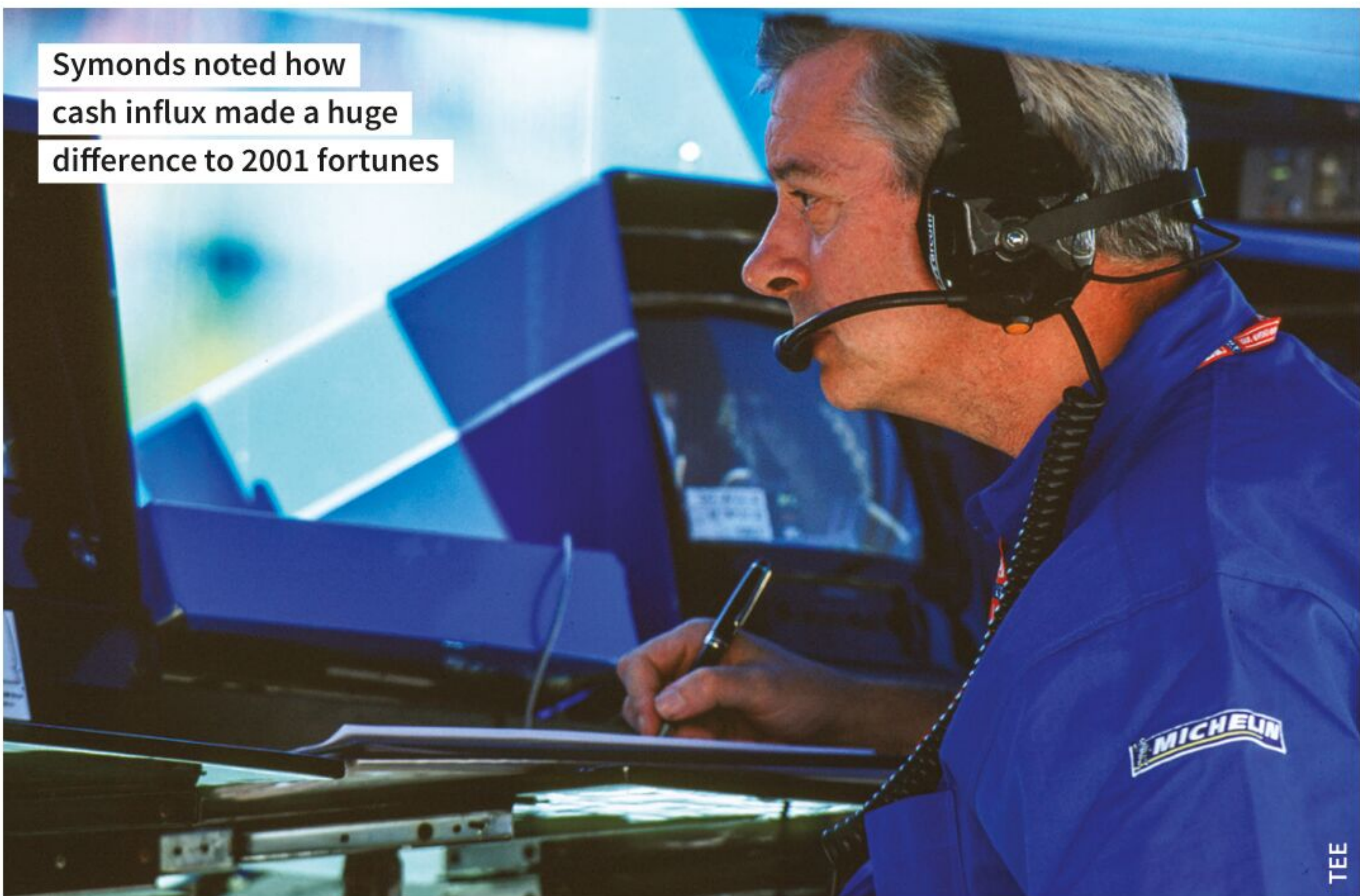
And while alignment with a manufacturer had its obvious benefits, the wide-angle 111-degree RS21 engine in the back of the B201 was late and not up to the job when it arrived. Its cause was not helped by the revelation during the British Grand Prix weekend that Renault had been a victim of industrial espionage, leaving the manufacturer convinced that former members of East German secret police had been paid to access information on the design on behalf of an undisclosed rival competitor. Several key elements were subsequently changed to ensure rivals didn't have access to contemporary developments.

Gascoyne spent pre-season testing and the early rounds playing down expectations, and for good reason. Around 150bhp down on rival units in the early races, the engine was also frequently unreliable, which hampered efforts to improve the set-up during practice. Symonds pulls no punches when reflecting on Renault's return as an engine supplier for the first time since 1997.

"That was a dreadful engine, it had no torque," he says. "We understood it a lot later, but the separation of the two banks meant that the trumpets didn't feed each other, and therefore an awful lot of the mid-range torque that you have on the narrow vee engine just wasn't there, and it took forever to understand that."

"We had problems with reliability, problems with the cam-drives, they had magnesium cylinder heads that used to erode rapidly, all sorts

“THE FACT THAT IT WAS LATE WASN'T SO MUCH OF A PROBLEM AS THE FACT IT SIMPLY WASN'T A GOOD ENGINE”



of problems with it. I think the fact that it was late wasn't so much of a problem as the fact that it simply wasn't a good engine."

Exhaust issues meant both cars were off the pace in the Melbourne opener, where Fisichella's was the last car still running, three laps down. The Italian scaled the giddy heights of sixth place at a rain-hit Interlagos thanks to a late pass on Jean Alesi's Prost, but for three races in a row traversing Imola, Barcelona and the A1-Ring, team-mate Jenson Button could muster no better than 21st on the grid, ahead of only Tarso Marques in the Minardi. Fisichella fared little better by taking 19th on each occasion.

Aside from a crippling lack of power, the car lacked downforce





BENETTON'S 2001 SEASON		
FISICHELLA	RACE RESULT	BUTTON
13	Australian GP	14
R	Malaysian GP	11
6	Brazilian GP	10
R	San Marino GP	12
14	Spanish GP	15
R	Austrian GP	R
R	Monaco GP	7
R	Canadian GP	R
11	European GP	13
11	French GP	16
13	British GP	15
4	German GP	5
R	Hungarian GP	R
3	Belgian GP	R
10	Italian GP	R
8	United States GP	9
17	Japanese GP	7
8 (11th)	Points	2 (17th)

2001 SCORING SYSTEM						
Position	1ST	2ND	3RD	4TH	5TH	6TH
Points	10	6	4	3	2	1

because it had been designed late to accommodate the engine. In the Spanish GP, both cars were soundly beaten by Benetton test driver Fernando Alonso in the Minardi, the Spaniard's fastest race lap almost 0.9 seconds quicker than either of the blue machines.

"I inherited the 2001 car, which was a complete dog and obviously the engine didn't help," reflects Gascoyne. "The trouble is when you start working on the windtunnel, it takes several months to make new models, and put in new processes, and even then when you've got everything ready to go, you've still got to design a quick car and test all the bits. So that took until mid-season."

Although Fisichella was an improved 10th on the grid in Monaco before crashing out, the mood in the camp was bleak. Button – a highly rated prospect after his rookie season with Williams in 2000 – was reportedly offered the chance to walk away on full pay to create a vacancy for Briatore protege Alonso, but turned it down, while rumours circled that Gascoyne was to hand in his notice. That, of course, was nonsense.

Speaking in 2001, Gascoyne reflected: "The most difficult thing was to try to motivate people, which was hard when we were having bad results. But there are no instant fixes in this business, you just have to put in the work and be aware that you are not going to be able to solve all your problems tomorrow. It was a case of standing up and taking the flak, but I never lost sight of where we were going. It was a difficult time, especially when some people were writing that I was out of here."

But there was light at the end of the tunnel – testing of a new aerodynamic package planned for the Hungarian GP suggested it offered 1-1.5s of performance. After a morale-boosting fourth and fifth for Fisichella and Button at Hockenheim (the Italian was just 1s behind Jacques Villeneuve's third-placed BAR on a day when poor reliability decimated the field), the struggles of the Michelin tyres hampered the

debut of the new package at the Hungaroring.

But Spa was a different story entirely. Although Fisichella felt he underperformed in qualifying to start eighth for the Belgian GP, he more than made up for it in the race. He got a cracking launch from the race's second start, following red flags caused by Luciano Burti's Prost shunting into the tyres, and leapt up to second behind Michael Schumacher's Ferrari at the first corner. Despite his power deficit, Fisichella managed to keep Coulthard's McLaren at bay for much of the race before succumbing late on at Eau Rouge. Third, though, was still a highly creditable result.

More engine unreliability masked the blue cars' pace at Monza, where Button charged into Jarno Trulli's Jordan at the first corner, and tyre blistering rendered another improved performance at Indianapolis pointless (when points were only handed out to the top six). But for the season finale at Suzuka, both cars made the top 10 on the grid for the first time and, after qualifying a season-best sixth, Fisichella ran ahead of Mika Hakkinen's McLaren until a third-lap spin. He lost fourth gear while running seventh late on, promoting Button to the position.

How does Symonds look back on the tumultuous 2001?

"I think it was a good year, I certainly enjoyed it," he says. "Our whole R&D effort was better, we had a couple of really good designers in Tim [Densham, who had joined in 1999 from the abandoned Honda project] and Mark – transformational I'd say – and the windtunnel was starting to work well. It was all coming together."

"It probably gave us the right sort of attitude so that when the Renault money did come along, we knew how to spend it, and I think that was an ethos that went all the way through. We were a very cost-effective team and that stood us in good stead in the early 2000s as we built up to that 2005 championship."



DON'T CHANGE A WINNING FORMULA

The manufacturers were unconvinced — and even hostile — when Stephane Ratel launched GT3. Now, 15 years on from its debut, they've sold more than 2000 cars and counting

GARY WATKINS

When Stephane Ratel presented his ideas for a new tier of GT racing to a group of manufacturers in November 2004, he got a mixed response. Ferrari and Porsche were opposed, while the representative from Mercedes sought him out afterwards to suggest in no uncertain terms that the German manufacturer would never build a car for the proposed class, FIA backing or no. The category was GT3 and, 15 successful years on from its launch in 2006, Mercedes is now one of its top participants, with total sales knocking on the door of 300 cars.

Mercedes isn't the only manufacturer to have sold GT3 cars in big numbers since it belatedly joined the party when the SLS AMG GT3 was released to customers for the 2011 season. Audi delivered its 200th R8 LMS GT3 midway through 2016, only seven and a bit years after the first iteration made its bow in the hands of a select band of

handpicked teams for what was a kind of development year. Ferrari and Porsche, for all their initial opposition, have gone on to produce factory-developed racers for the class by the dozen. The German manufacturer has now sold 83 of its latest-generation 911 GT3-R, based on the 911.2-shape model, and it was only introduced in 2019.

So many cars have been built in significant volumes — there have been more than 50 homologated models from 20 manufacturers — that it's difficult to put an accurate figure on total GT3 production since 2006. Back in 2013, Autosport estimated that it was somewhere between 800 and 1000. Eight years on, it has to be some way north of 2000 cars.

The GT3 mantra eventually found a warm welcome in the boardrooms of the world's major sportscar manufacturers because the category has come to represent good business. The reason is that



GT World Challenge Europe at Magny-Cours 2021, 15 years after European GT3 kick-off at Silverstone in 2006 (left)

GT3 spread to the four corners of the globe at a rapid pace. There are top-line series for the cars all over the world. FIA GT3 has not only become the default category for national sportscar racing, but it has been adopted by the important enduro races around the world, from the Spa and Nurburgring 24-hour classics to the Bathurst 12 Hour. It even has a home in the IMSA SportsCar Championship as GT Daytona, and a place under the umbrella of Le Mans 24 Hours organiser the Automobile Club de l'Ouest in the Michelin-sponsored Le Mans Cup and in the Asian Le Mans Series.

QUICK OUT OF THE BLOCKS

The GT3 concept was launched in Monaco in December 2005. Less than five months later, the FIA GT3 European Championship kicked off at Silverstone with a 43-car grid split between eight marques. Among them was Dodge, which was part of Chrysler, and therefore at the time encompassed in the same automotive group as Mercedes.

The man from Mercedes had told Ratel late the previous year that, if he wanted cars from the group on his grid, he should go to the US and buy some. Merc's representative was talking about the Dodge Viper Competition Coupe, a car that had started out as a one-make racer but had found its way into series such as the Sports Car Club of America's World Challenge. "Those were his exact words: 'go to America and buy some,'" recalls Ratel. "So that's what I did. It was quite a financial risk, but for the first race we had nine Vipers split between three teams. I managed to resell all of them."

There were Porsches and Ferraris at Silverstone too. The Porsche



Prestige cars lined up at GT3's Monaco launch

911 GT3 Cup one-make racer set the benchmark for performance in the new class, even if its builder was antagonistic to the new category. Everything else was balanced around it. It's worth remembering that the GT3 European series was initially billed as a 'Cup of Cups'. That explains the drawn-out podium ceremonies that visitors to Silverstone all those years ago might remember: >>

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Ratel (right) with Mosley, who played a key role in Balance of Performance

there was a separate podium for each marque of car!

Ferrari was represented by a reworked Ferrari F430 Challenge racer developed in Switzerland by sometime Formula 1 driver Loris Kessel. Ratel describes the late Swiss as one of his “GT3 founders” who helped kickstart the category. “Loris was a Ferrari dealer and for him to go against the will of the factory was a very brave thing to do,” recalls Ratel. “But that was Loris. He told me, ‘I’ll do it, I don’t care.’”

Ratel describes GT3 as an “immediate success”. That’s a reference to the monster grid assembled at Silverstone for the two one-hour races that ran in support of that weekend’s FIA GT Championship round and the way the category subsequently spread around the world. “It took off like a house on fire, and kept growing — there hasn’t been one downturn in its history,” explains Ratel. “For the second year we launched into Germany [with the ADAC GT Masters], and in the third year in 2008 we had a series in Brazil. It was like ‘boom.’”

Today the sun never sets on GT3 racing: it has reached the four corners of the world. There probably aren’t too many weekends of the year when there aren’t GT3 cars racing somewhere.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS

GT3 might have been an instant success, but it had been a long time in the making. There was no eureka moment for Ratel. The building blocks for the category had been slowly falling into place over the preceding 10 years or so.

Ratel launched what was, looking back, a kind of prototype of GT3



Porsche is a big player, and won Spa 24 Hours blue riband last year



“TODAY THE SUN NEVER SETS ON GT3 RACING: IT HAS REACHED THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE WORLD”

in the mid-1990s, when he brought cars from the Venturi series that had been his entree into motorsport together with other one-make GT cars in the Philippe Charriol Supersports Trophy. He concedes it wasn't entirely a success. The two iterations of one-make Lamborghini series that followed were also vital staging posts on the road to GT3. The Supertrophy Diablo GTR that raced up to the end of 2002 provided much of the inspiration for GT3.

“Those cars could do a similar lap time to a GT2 car at fast circuits,” explains Ratel. “But they were so much cheaper to buy and run because they were just lightly modified road cars. If Lamborghini wanted to do a GT2 car they'd have to spend a fortune reducing the weight and producing a race engine to run with an air restrictor [the means of controlling power in GT racing at the time], and end up not going much faster.”

Why not, thought Ratel, take the concept behind a relatively standard Diablo GTR as the template for a new breed of GT racer, do away with a detailed rulebook, and just balance the performance of the various cars? The lessons learned in the FIA GT Championship on the arrival of the mid-engined, carbon-chassis Maserati MC12 at the back end of 2004 proved that equating the performance of different kinds of GT machinery was eminently possible.

Ratel had wanted to ban a car developed out of sister marque Ferrari's Enzo with racing very much in mind; he didn't want it in his championship. But FIA boss Max Mosley came up with an alternative and more conciliatory approach. “He said, ‘We're not >>

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going to ban it, but we are going to balance it against the other cars,” remembers Ratel. “That way, he told me, the manufacturers would realise there’s no point doing that kind of car because it won’t be any quicker than a conventional car like the Ferrari 550 Maranello or the Chevrolet Corvette C6.”

Another flag in the sand that marked the route to GT3 came in 1999. With FIA GT on its uppers after the series had all but imploded following the glory years of the original GT1 era in 1997 and 1998, Ratel persuaded the FIA that the idea that only manufacturers could homologate cars had to be abandoned. The same rule that allowed Prodrive to develop the Ferrari 550 Maranello to race in Ratel’s series and at the Le Mans 24 Hours also gave Kessel his chance with the F430 in GT3.

Many of the cars on the grid at Silverstone in May 2006 were produced by what Ratel has always called ‘tuners’. Among them were the Lamborghini Gallardos developed in Germany by Reiter

“PEOPLE MALIGN BoP, BUT IT’S BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN STOPPING PEOPLE SPENDING TOO MUCH MONEY”

Engineering, another one of Ratel’s “founders”. A Ford GT from Swiss-based Matech Concepts would follow in year two. The route into GT3 for these motorsport engineering specialists was subsequently closed when a new broom swept through the FIA after Jean Todt succeeded Mosley as president, but by then GT3 was already a proven success of which the manufacturers wanted to be a part.

WHY HAS IT BEEN A SUCCESS?

Ex-Formula 1 designer Peter Wright, who helped conceive GT3 with Ratel in his role as president of the FIA GT Commission, knows exactly why. And it’s down to the Balance of Performance,



which was very much his baby. “The BoP makes the economics of GT3 sound,” he explains. “People malign the BoP, but it has been successful in stopping people spending too much money on the cars. It has turned GT racing into a profit centre for the manufacturers.”

Ratel reckons that limiting GT3 to what he calls “prestige brands and iconic models” is another reason for its success. By ‘prestige brands’ he means the likes of Ferrari, Lamborghini and Audi, but to illustrate what represents an iconic model he points to Nissan’s GT-R.

“When you have a BoP, you have the danger of Ferrari being beaten by brands from a different market sector,” he says. “If that happens they will go. That’s why it was important to limit who can come and

THE GT3 CARS YOU’VE PROBABLY FORGOTTEN



MORGAN AERO 8/SUPERSPORTS GT3

British fans present at Silverstone in 2009 might remember a double victory for Morgan in the GT3 Europe races. Marque enthusiast Eric Sturdda set up the AutoGT operation together with former grand prix drivers Jean-Pierre Jabouille and Jacques Laffite to develop a car with Morgan’s backing, only to pull the plug at the end of 2009 over a homologation row concerning the car’s exhaust system.



ASCARI KZ1-R

Niche manufacturer Ascari, founded by racer Klaas Zwart and based in the Banbury premises now occupied by the Haas Formula 1 team, was on the grid from the get-go of GT3 with its BMW-engined KZ1-R. The carbon-chassis machine was weighed down under the BoP, but it did enjoy success. Most notably it won the British GT Championship title in 2009 with the Jones twins, David and Godfrey, in a car fielded by Team Pyro.



CHEVROLET CAMARO GT3

Hans Reiter built more than 130 Lamborghini Gallardos for GT3, but he also had a side project with a Chevrolet Camaro under the Sareni banner (made up from the first two letters of each of his daughters’ names). The idea was to produce a budget contender that sold for two thirds of the cost of its rivals, boasting huge power and not a lot of downforce. The car only raced a handful of times in 2014 and 2015.



Mercedes said it would never build GT3s. Now it's the category's biggest volume manufacturer

play. I won't name any names, but there have been manufacturers who have wanted to come in. I couldn't stop them developing and homologating a car, but I told them their car would not be eligible for any of the SRO championships. If they are excluded from those series, then there is no market and they don't have a programme."

A LUCKY ESCAPE FOR GT3

The FIA announced at the back end of 2012 that it was planning to rationalise GT racing and bring the GTE class together with GT3 as part of a so-called convergence. The plan was for a category named simply GT to replace GT3, and the so-called GT+ version to take the place of GTE.

Ratel was vehemently opposed. 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it,' he cried. Then as now, he insisted that the overt factory competition and customer racing are two different things. "Do the maths – look at the price of a GTE car: it's more than double a GT3," he says. "If you have convergence, somehow merge two classes, you are going to end up with a price somewhere in the middle. The GT3 market could not have supported those kinds of costs. You could have forgotten about having 50 cars in the Blancpain Endurance Series [now the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup]."

The convergence plans lingered on for 18 months, but were eventually shouted down by a group of manufacturers with entrenched positions in the GTE arena. It was, suggests Ratel, a lucky escape.

THE DANGERS AHEAD

New rules come into force in GT3 in 2022, or rather new homologation guidelines. The dangers facing the category are not presented by the latest regulations, argues Ratel, but the places in which GT3 is now finding a home. He points to the DTM's adoption of the class for 2021, and the replacement of GT Le Mans in IMSA with GTD Pro in 2022. GT3 could yet find a home in the World Endurance Championship and at the Le Mans 24 Hours after the current commitment to GTE comes to an end after 2022.

"GT3 is about customer racing and has never been comparable to what was happening in the DTM or an LMP1 programme, where the money comes from the marketing department," he says.

"When that happens you have an escalation of costs and performance. What's happening in the DTM and IMSA are signals that GT3 could cause problems."

It is the very success of GT3, argues Ratel, that has "put it in danger".



JAGUAR XKR GT3

Stalwart sportscar entrant Richard Lloyd wanted to lure Jaguar back to the Le Mans 24 Hours, and as a lead-in he managed to gain tacit support for an XKR GT3 racer developed by his Apex Motorsport organisation. Five cars were built, but the team struggled to make the design's supercharged engine produce consistent power before the project lost impetus and ultimately folded in the wake of Lloyd's death in 2008.



LOTUS EXIGE GT3

Lotus took the lightweight route into GT3 with a 750kg Exige powered by a 1.8-litre supercharged Toyota in-line four, the smallest engine in class. Five were built and the car claimed four class wins in British GT in 2006 with Cadena Sport, but plans for a move into FIA GT3 the following year never materialised. The car could match the bigger-engined cars on lap time but not in a racing dogfight.

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VeeKay cements
his US racing
pedigree with victory
at Indianapolis



VeeKay wins Indy GP battle with Grosjean

The Dutch IndyCar rising star scored his maiden series victory ahead of the pole-scoring ex-Formula 1 driver

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ

PHOTOGRAPHY  motorsport
IMAGES



The Grand Prix of Indianapolis will always live in the shadow of its Memorial Day Weekend brother held on the iconic oval, but it has served up plenty of good racing since its inception in 2014. And if not all of the battles are for the lead, at least that possibility is there.

The 14-turn, 2.439-mile road course at Indianapolis Motor Speedway includes two long straights that allow cars to draft, with or without using the 200 seconds of 'extra' push to pass (1.65 bar as opposed to 1.5 bar) turbo boost. And while there are high, medium and low-speed corners that demand good downforce, much of this can be provided by the underbody of the car, as per one of the prime intentions of the current aerokit – because the track surface is so pool-table smooth, the teams can slam the cars on the deck. Hence you'll never hear IndyCar drivers at the IMS road course bitching about being unable to follow due to dirty air from the wings of the car in front.

Also, several corners are wide, as are the front and back straights, allowing for a variety of lines to be taken, thereby creating passing opportunities. And the virtuous circle is completed by the fact that these lines get used so frequently that, however bad the rubber marbles are as the Firestones slough off their outer surfaces, there are usually at least two usable lanes at the end of each straight, and a driver can experiment with different lines through several turns without skittering off into oblivion.

The result is a fine track that can reward speed and aggression, and doesn't punish experimentation. Enter Rinus VeeKay.

Last year's IndyCar Rookie of the Year is a man who is not yet quite as famous for his speed and aggression as fellow young gun Pato O'Ward, but only because 1) the 20-year-old Dutchman took a little longer to tame his ebullience into constructing serious points hauls rather than occasional 'OMG, did you see that?!' flashpoints, and 2) because Ed Carpenter Racing has traditionally been a team that shone on ovals and only sporadically on road and street courses.

But VeeKay has always been extra-special on the Indianapolis road course. Last weekend, he became the first driver to win races at all levels of the Road to Indy – USF2000, Indy Pro (formerly Pro Mazda) and Indy Lights – and IndyCar itself with his first top-tier success. He also cemented his relationship with the course from which he lives just a short bike-ride away. In USF2000 he finished second here; in Pro Mazda he placed third; in Indy Lights he took pole, fastest lap, and won.

Ed Carpenter was immediately impressed by VeeKay when ECR tested him at Portland in 2019, and his desire to do a deal was confirmed by the kid's pace in a second test at Mid-Ohio. And when they rocked up at the GP Indy last July for the second race of the COVID-affected season, VeeKay produced his first top-five finish. At the Harvest Grand Prix at the same venue in August, he took pole and scored his first IndyCar podium.

Fast-forward to May 2021, and he delivered his first IndyCar win in thoroughly convincing fashion. VeeKay's triumph was the first for Carpenter's team since Josef Newgarden dominated Iowa Speedway in 2016, and the first on a road/street course since Newgarden led Luca Filippi in an ECR 1-2 at Toronto in 2015.

Notable about this race was that IndyCar made it 85 laps long. Last year's GP Indy was 80 laps, which enabled Graham Rahal to featherfoot his way to second on a two-stop strategy. The Harvest GP double-header saw one of the races reduced to 75 laps, which meant everyone of note tried to do it in two stops, but the other race was a barnstormer of 85 laps where no one could complete it in just two stops and therefore just had to drive to the max in between their three stops. It was one of the best road-course races of the last decade.

Hence the series' decision to keep with that race length for last Saturday's event. It didn't deliver thrills to the same extent, but it wasn't short of action.

Romain Grosjean was the main topic du jour on Friday, because in only his third IndyCar event he delivered pole position >>

to Dale Coyne Racing with RWR in his Dallara-Honda. Like VeeKay's win, this qualifying topper was of special significance to the team, since it was Coyne's first pole since Sebastien Bourdais went quickest at Phoenix three years ago. And with Grosjean being the charming guy that he is, and a recent survivor of a potentially lethal accident, he was hot property.

"Of all the tracks I've been racing in the US, this is the one that feels the most familiar," he said after beating Team Penske driver Newgarden by 0.13 seconds. "I can tell it was actually designed for Formula 1, the way the kerbs are, the layout and the corners. I knew I was going to feel OK on the track quite quickly, whereas St Pete takes a little bit more time to learn. Barber, a few tricks there that you need to understand. Here for me it's a bit more straightforward..."

"Going into the weekend, we obviously

"I can tell the track was designed for Formula 1. I knew I was going to feel OK quite quickly"

did a lot of work to be good and also just learning about it. Our first segment of quali wasn't so good. Second one felt much better. Going into the Fast Six I never ran scrubbed red tyres, so I didn't know what to expect from the car. It behaved really well.

"The first lap I had a mistake. It was a fast lap, but I had a mistake. I knew I had more pace in the second lap. It went really, really good. I thought that could be it. That was it."

Newgarden was disappointed but reasonably content to have outperformed his Penske team-mates. Will Power, a four-time winner here, spun while trying to set a 'banker lap' on hard tyres in Q2 and was stuck in 12th. Simon Pagenaud was 10th, feeling a little more settled with his



road course set-up, and rookie Scott McLaughlin was an inspired fifth, behind only Grosjean, Newgarden, Jack Harvey (Meyer Shank Racing) and Chip Ganassi Racing's Alex Palou, who had lost FP1 to a water leak but delivered well in qualifying.

Grosjean burst into the lead at the start, but behind him sixth starter Conor Daly in the other ECR Dallara-Chevrolet was tapped into the Turn 1 grass by Pagenaud after closing to the apex on the Penske driver too abruptly. When Daly spun and stalled, out came the full-course yellow.

VeeKay, who had started from seventh on primary (harder) Firestones, ran sixth in the early stages behind Grosjean, Harvey (later to be sidelined by a right-rear puncture), Newgarden, Palou and McLaughlin.

Grosjean pitted at the end of lap 25 for more reds, while Palou also stopped and took on blacks. That made him easy prey for the charging Harvey, who crossed the start/finish line just 2s behind Grosjean next time by, a gap that held steady once Grosjean got his reds up to temperature.

Grosjean started to edge away from Harvey by lap 30, only a tenth or two at a time, but it meant on lap 33 that the leader's advantage was 3.6s.

VeeKay was now running fourth in this stint but, as before, he was one of the first to the pits for the second round of stops, triggering a flood of pit visitors. Meanwhile, late-stopper Grosjean had an alarming moment as he lapped Takuma Sato, banging wheels with the Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing driver, while a far cleaner move occurred moments later. Palou was inadvertently held up by team-mate Jimmie Johnson as they departed the pitlane. It cost Palou momentum onto the back straight, and VeeKay took the opportunity to drive between the Ganassi drivers and claim a net second. By now, Harvey was out of the picture, his strong run falling victim to a puncture, which meant he finished off the lead lap.

Grosjean, who had fallen back behind Sato after an aggressive unlapping manoeuvre, pitted on lap 43, but it wasn't a stellar stop and he was now on primaries, making him vulnerable to the charging VeeKay. The ECR driver stalked him throughout lap 44, and



Newgarden maintained his recent momentum with drive to fourth



Grosjean felt at home on this track, leading for 44 of the race's 85 laps

then dived inside at the right-handed Turn 12 and held it to grab the (net) lead. The only drivers ahead were the off-strategy Ryan Hunter-Reay — 9s ahead — and Scott Dixon.

By lap 57 Grosjean was only 2.2s from the lead, with Palou 1.4s further behind. Eight seconds behind Palou was Newgarden, just ahead of Rahal, who had recovered superbly after getting caught up in the Daly incident, and then making a stop under yellow that left him insufficient time to catch the field when the race suddenly went green.

When Grosjean made his final stop three laps after VeeKay, with 22 remaining, he emerged 5s behind the leader.

VeeKay never looked like losing from there and duly recorded his first series victory, with Grosjean a fine second. Third place for Palou moves him to within 13 points of team-mate Dixon (who finished ninth), while Newgarden has now risen to third spot as he continues to recover from his unfortunate opening round. ❄

NEXT REPORT

INDIANAPOLIS 500 3 JUNE ISSUE

All the action from 'the greatest spectacle in racing' as the Indianapolis Motor Speedway hosts the 105th running of the Indy 500.



RESULTS ROUND 4/15, INDIANAPOLIS (USA), 15 MAY (85 LAPS – 207.315 MILES)

POS	DRIVER	TEAM/CAR	TIME
1	Rinus van Kalmthout (NLD)	Ed Carpenter Racing / Dallara-Chevrolet	1h47m08.5773s
2	Romain Grosjean (FRA)	Dale Coyne Racing with RWR / Dallara-Honda	+4.9510s
3	Alex Palou (ESP)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	+15.0726s
4	Josef Newgarden (USA)	Team Penske / Dallara-Chevrolet	+18.4472s
5	Graham Rahal (USA)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing / Dallara-Honda	+26.9813s
6	Simon Pagenaud (FRA)	Team Penske / Dallara-Chevrolet	+27.8704s
7	Alexander Rossi (USA)	Andretti Autosport / Dallara-Honda	+33.2703s
8	Scott McLaughlin (NZL)	Team Penske / Dallara-Chevrolet	+36.1862s
9	Scott Dixon (NZL)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	+36.8362s
10	Marcus Ericsson (SWE)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	+37.1971s
11	Will Power (AUS)	Team Penske / Dallara-Chevrolet	+39.8020s
12	Ryan Hunter-Reay (USA)	Andretti Autosport / Dallara-Honda	+40.3892s
13	Colton Herta (USA)	Andretti Autosport with Curb-Agajanian / Dallara-Honda	+43.1147s
14	Ed Jones (ARE)	Dale Coyne Racing with Vasser Sullivan / Dallara-Honda	+43.8110s
15	Patricio O'Ward (MEX)	Arrow McLaren SP / Dallara-Chevrolet	+44.5448s
16	Takuma Sato (JPN)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing / Dallara-Honda	+44.9971s
17	Felix Rosenqvist (SWE)	Arrow McLaren SP / Dallara-Chevrolet	+45.4208s
18	James Hinchcliffe (CAN)	Andretti Steinbrenner Autosport / Dallara-Honda	+1m05.1989s
19	Sebastien Bourdais (FRA)	AJ Foyt Enterprises / Dallara-Chevrolet	-1lap
20	Dalton Kellett (CAN)	AJ Foyt Enterprises / Dallara-Chevrolet	-1lap
21	Juan Pablo Montoya (COL)	Arrow McLaren SP / Dallara-Chevrolet	-1lap
22	Charlie Kimball (USA)	AJ Foyt Enterprises / Dallara-Chevrolet	-1lap
23	Jack Harvey (GBR)	Meyer Shank Racing / Dallara-Honda	-1lap
24	Jimmie Johnson (USA)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	-1lap
25	Conor Daly (USA)	Ed Carpenter Racing / Dallara-Chevrolet	50laps-retired

Winner's average speed 116.096mph. **Fastest lap** van Kalmthout 1m10.8767s, 123.883mph.

Q3 1 Grosjean 1m09.4396s; **2** Newgarden 1m09.5665s; **3** Harvey 1m09.6528s; **4** Palou 1m09.7118s; **5** McLaughlin 1m09.7140s; **6** Daly 1m09.8662s.

Q2 Palou 1m09.4743s; **Harvey** 1m09.5189s; **Grosjean** 1m09.5476s; **Daly** 1m09.5627s; **McLaughlin** 1m09.7727s; **Newgarden** 1m09.7837s; **7** van Kalmthout 1m09.8185s; **8** Herta 1m09.8222s; **9** Jones 1m09.8548s; **10** Pagenaud 1m09.8722s; **11** Rahal 1m09.9060s; **12** Power no time.

Q1 – GROUP 1 van Kalmthout 1m09.4890s; **Herta** 1m09.5867s; **Jones** 1m09.7152s; **Harvey** 1m09.7589s; **Rahal** 1m09.7918s; **Pagenaud** 1m09.8061s; **13** Rosenqvist 1m09.8243s; **15** Ericsson 1m09.8382s; **17** Sato 1m09.8665s;

19 Hunter-Reay 1m09.8759s; **21** Kimball 1m10.6810s; **23** Johnson 1m11.0455s.

Q1 – GROUP 2 Newgarden 1m09.6101s; **Palou** 1m09.6589s; **McLaughlin** 1m09.7537s; **Daly** 1m09.7646s; **Grosjean** 1m09.8556s; **Power** 1m09.8963s; **14** Rossi 1m09.9012s; **16** Dixon 1m09.9512s; **18** O'Ward 1m10.0726s; **20** Bourdais 1m10.1830s; **22** Hinchcliffe 1m10.6174s; **24** Kellett 1m10.9312s; **25** Montoya 1m11.1370s.

CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Dixon 176; **2** Palou 163; **3** Newgarden 148; **4** O'Ward 146; **5** Rahal 137; **6** van Kalmthout 135; **7** Pagenaud 130; **8** McLaughlin 123; **9** Power 118; **10** Herta 117.

Albuquerque and Taylor extend Acura's white-hot streak in Ohio

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IMSA SPORTSCAR
MID-OHIO (USA)
16 MAY
ROUND 3/13

Wayne Taylor Racing strengthened its lead to 55 points in the IMSA SportsCar standings as Filipe Albuquerque and Ricky Taylor guided their Acura ARX-05 to a narrow victory over the Action Express Cadillac DPi-V.R of all-Brazilian pairing Pipo Derani and Felipe Nasr last Sunday at Mid-Ohio.

Acura/American Honda, which has a dozen different manufacturing and R&D facilities in Ohio, has now won all four races since IMSA's return to the parkland venue in 2018.

British duo Harry Tincknell and Oliver Jarvis had to settle for third place in their Mazda RT24-P, although they'd landed pole

and dominated much of the 122-lap race. After struggling for pace during practice on Friday, the Multimatic-Mazda team made wholesale set-up changes – “We threw the kitchen sink at it,” said Multimatic boss Larry Holt – which transformed the handling and enabled Tincknell to establish a blistering new track record in qualifying.

Albuquerque, on his first visit to the 2.3-mile track, started second, less than a tenth adrift of the pole time, but was soon left gasping in Tincknell's wake on race day. The gap grew to over 12 seconds before the first round of pitstops with 40 minutes on the clock, after which Derani and Nasr emerged in second, having been the first of the Prototype contenders to make their first visit. Tincknell extended his lead further before making his second stop at the halfway point and handing over the car to Jarvis.

Unfortunately, the pair's fine work was

undone when the caution flags flew for the first and only time with about an hour to go. The timing ensured that everyone would be working hard to minimise their fuel consumption when the green flags waved again with 45 minutes remaining. Crucially, the Albuquerque/Taylor Acura had stretched its fuel load the furthest, so required a quicker fill than the Mazda and was able to leapfrog into second place behind Nasr, who took full advantage of having been called into the pits moments before the full-course caution.

It was Nasr who led at the restart, on a track which offers precious few overtaking opportunities, but Taylor dug deep and pulled off a brilliant pass after the restart. Taylor then managed to conserve his fuel and squeak home just 0.368s ahead of Nasr. The Mazda also managed to stretch its fuel load to the finish to maintain its streak of three podium finishes to begin the season.

Loic Duval/Tristan Vautier finished fourth in their JDC Motorsports Cadillac, profiting when two other cars – including the Chip Ganassi Racing Cadillac of Kevin Magnussen/Renger van der Zande – needed a splash of fuel in the dying moments.

In the GTD competition, Jack Hawksworth looked set to score a second successive Mid-Ohio triumph for himself and pole-winning team-mate Aaron Telitz, only for their Vasser Sullivan Lexus RC F GT3 to suffer a suspension failure after 50 laps. Their misfortune allowed Bill Auberlen and Robby Foley to take the spoils aboard their Turner Motorsport BMW M6 GT3.

JEREMY SHAW



Bowman heads Hendrick rout

NASCAR CUP
DOVER (USA)
16 MAY
ROUND 13/36

Alex Bowman led home his team-mates as the Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet crew dominated the NASCAR Cup race at Dover last weekend. He grabbed control during the round of pitstops on lap 304 of 400 and never let go, holding off Kyle Larson by two seconds to score the fourth top-flight win of his career.

Fellow Hendrick racers Chase Elliott and William Byron finished third and fourth, marking the first time in the team's history that its cars had locked out the top four.



Bowman's win at Dover carried added weight because it came at the track where the driver he replaced this season – seven-time Cup champion Jimmie Johnson – had won 11 times in his career.

“It's pretty amazing,” reflected Bowman. “We've been off for a couple weeks but we're still the same race team that won at Richmond. We've just been a little down on ourselves. We got us back motivated after a rough week last weekend at Darlington. Our pitstops were incredible today. But to run 1-2-3-4 for HMS, it's so cool.”

Completing the top 10 were Joey Logano, Kevin Harvick, Denny Hamlin, Tyler Reddick, Daniel Suarez and Cole Custer, the last-named earning his best finish of the season so far.

Larson had dominated much of the race, winning the first two stages. After losing the lead to Bowman during the pitstops, he was able to stay close to his stablemate for several laps, but never got in position to challenge to reclaim the lead.

“All four of us HMS cars were pretty equal,” Larson said. “It was like whoever got out in the lead was going to be hard to beat. On one of the restarts, I got to his bumper and kind of got him loose, but Harvick was coming so we had to let each other go.”

JIM UTTER

WEEKEND WINNERS

IMSA SPORTSCAR
MID-OHIO (USA)
DPI Ricky Taylor/Filipe Albuquerque
Wayne Taylor Racing (Acura ARX-05)
GTD Bill Auberlen/Robby Foley
Turner Motorsport (BMW M6 GT3)

NASCAR CUP
DOVER (USA)
Alex Bowman
Hendrick Motorsports
(Chevrolet Camaro ZL1 1LE)

NASCAR XFINITY SERIES
DOVER (USA)
Austin Cindric
Team Penske (Ford Mustang)

SUPER FORMULA
AUTOPOLIS (JPN)
Giuliano Alesi
Team TOM'S (Dallara-Toyota)

BRAZILIAN STOCK CARS
INTERLAGOS (BRA)
Race 1 Gabriel Casagrande
Vogel Motorsport (Chevrolet Cruze)
Race 2 Antonio Felix da Costa
Eurofarma RC (Chevrolet Cruze)



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Alesi succeeds through the fog and rain

SUPER FORMULA
AUTOPOLIS (JPN)
16 MAY
ROUND 3/7

Giuliano Alesi sensationally scored a first Super Formula victory on only his second start in the Japanese series in a weather-shortened Autopolis race. The son of ex-Formula 1 racer Jean, standing in for Kazuki Nakajima at TOM'S, commanded the contest and was declared the winner after just 13 laps of 42 had been completed.

Alesi set up his improbable triumph on Saturday by scoring pole in a wet session that was interrupted by no fewer than four red flags. He edged out TOM'S Toyota team-mate Ritomo Miyata by a little under 0.1 seconds.

There was doubt whether the race would go ahead at all as Autopolis was enveloped in thick fog on Sunday



morning, but this lifted in time for the bout to start around 40 minutes behind schedule, albeit on a soaking track.

Alesi nailed his getaway, survived an early safety-car restart, and was then never seriously challenged until events were stopped due to heavy rain. An attempt to restart the race was abandoned as more fog arrived, before a result was declared and half-points awarded. It meant Alesi matched the feat of the driver he was replacing – Nakajima also won on his second start in what was then known as Formula Nippon back in 2011 at Autopolis.

Nobuharu Matsushita (B-Max) shot up the order from 13th on the grid to third on the opening lap, and then benefited from a

mistake by Yuhi Sekiguchi, just as the race was about to restart after the safety car, to move into second. But a 5s penalty for a start infringement meant Matsushita slipped a place in the final classification behind impressive Inging rookie Sena Sakaguchi.

Mugen's Tomoki Nojiri extended his points lead by finishing fifth behind Miyata, with most of his closest rivals in the championship failing to score. Nojiri leads the standings from Ryo Hirakawa by 25 points with four rounds remaining.

JAMIE KLEIN

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WRT masters Styrian rain for more glory

EUROPEAN LE MANS SERIES
RED BULL RING (AUT)
16 MAY
ROUND 2/6

Team WRT claimed a hard-fought win at the Red Bull Ring during the second round of the European Le Mans Series campaign. In a race impacted by heavy showers, the clear points-leading outfit managed to keep its head above water to come out on top after four hours.

The early running was led by the two United Autosports ORECA-Gibson 07 machines of Nico Jamin and Phil Hanson until a very rapid first pitstop brought Nyck de Vries and the G-Drive Racing squad to the fore. A Formula E frontrunner with Mercedes, de Vries proved extremely rapid and would speed away from Robert Kubica in the Team WRT car. The fifth-starting crew had made up ground courtesy of a strong opening stint by Yifei Ye, but now trailed by half a minute as the two



United cars slowly started to fall back.

The rhythm of the race changed completely at the halfway point, however, with a cloud burst drenching the Styrian track and bringing out the safety car. The final-stint battle between G-Drive's Franco Colapinto and WRT's Louis Deletraz proved dramatic. The Argentinian youngster pushed hard on a drying surface to stay ahead of the more experienced Deletraz.

It was not to be, though. Deletraz eventually found a way past with less than 20 minutes to go and eased away to the finish to notch a 21.5-second triumph, ensuring WRT maintains its 100% record so far this term.

NELSON VALKENBURG

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Crawford denied treble after fierce battle with Foster

EUROFORMULA OPEN
PAUL RICARD (FRA)
15-16 MAY
ROUND 2/8

Red Bull Junior Jak Crawford mopped up his first two Euroformula Open wins in France, but was denied a treble when he was hit by Louis Foster as they battled for the lead in the finale.

Crawford wasn't even old enough to take part in the opening round supporting the Portuguese Grand Prix until the Sunday, when he celebrated his 16th

birthday. So this was the American's first proper outing in his Motopark Dallara-Spiess. He qualified on pole and led throughout the opener from team-mate and first-round dominator Cameron Das. Foster, driving for Motopark satellite team CryptoTower, was third.

Foster burst through from fourth on the grid to lead the reversed-grid race from Casper Stevenson (Van Amersfoort Racing). That was until Crawford picked his way into second. He then closed in on Foster and passed the Briton at the start of the penultimate lap. Das also got past Stevenson to finish third.

The final race was a thriller. Foster got past poleman Crawford at the start, and Das latched on to form a frantic three-car battle. Foster's ultra-aggressive defending couldn't stop Crawford passing, before Foster audaciously got back ahead. It ended with Crawford making another move in front after Signes, only for Foster to hit him up the rear. Das slipped ahead and held off Crawford to the end, while Foster's spin dropped him to eighth before he recovered to sixth. Another good scrap further back was won by VAR's Rafael Villagomez, who took third.



WEEKEND WINNERS

EUROPEAN LE MANS SERIES
RED BULL RING (AUT)
Robert Kubica/Louis Deletraz/Yifei Ye
Team WRT (ORECA-Gibson 07)

EUROFORMULA OPEN
PAUL RICARD (FRA)
Races 1 & 2 Jak Crawford
Team Motopark
Race 3 Cameron Das
Team Motopark

INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN
PAUL RICARD (FRA)
Race 1 Ivan Peklin/Jordan Pepper
Team Lazarus
(Bentley Continental GT3)
Race 2 Michele Beretta/Frederik Schandorff
Vincenzo Sospiri Racing
(Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo)

INDY LIGHTS
INDIANAPOLIS (USA)
Race 1 Linus Lundqvist
Global Racing Group with
HMD Motorsports
Race 2 David Malukas
HMD Motorsports

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Miller mops up as Marquez takes a tumble

As thick black clouds gathered above Le Mans just before the start of the 27-lap MotoGP race last weekend, the grid was sure that rain was on its way. But the big question remained over precisely when the drops would begin to fall. Not since Brno in 2017 had the series enjoyed a flag-to-flag contest where changing weather had required a mid-race bike swap.

On that occasion, Marc Marquez timed his switch from wets to slick tyres supremely to take an utterly dominant 12-second victory. Wind on four years and, as the rain began to fall, the Honda rider – just three races into his comeback from injury – found himself in the podium places.

As the leading pack, headed by Yamaha's Fabio Quartararo, came into the pitlane to switch to their wet bikes at the end of lap five, Marquez emerged in front after his change, aided by Quartararo parking on the wrong side of the Yamaha box, which would later cop him a long-lap penalty.

What made Marquez so devastating on that day at Brno was his ability to get his tyres switched on straight away. This time around, as Marquez navigated his way through the Dunlop chicane safely once he got his medium wet tyres up to temperature, Alex Rins crashed behind in what he billed as another “stupid mistake” to batter his title hopes. He would fall again later. In fact, it was a day to forget all round for Suzuki as world champion Joan Mir didn't even make it into the pitlane to get his spare bike – he crashed on his in-lap.



Miller ecstatic at third MotoGP win; Quartararo happy to take points lead...

By lap eight, Marquez was 2s clear of second-placed Quartararo and on course for a sensational return to the top of the podium. But he crashed at the final corner a lap later. This released Quartararo, but he had another problem coming from behind.

Five years split Jack Miller's first and second MotoGP wins. But he only had to wait a further 14 days to seal his third. Miller had “a score to settle” with Le Mans, he admitted pre-weekend, after a strong wet result in 2020 went begging due to an unavoidable retirement, the result of being forced onto a broken bike when the rain fell. Miller opted for the soft wet rear tyre at his stop relative to Quartararo's medium, and had a pace advantage when the water level was at its worst, which he used to effortlessly whittle away at the Yamaha rider's lead.

Le Mans misfortune looked to strike

Miller again, however, as he was hit with a double long-lap penalty for pitlane speeding. But such was his pace that this barely offered Quartararo any breathing space when the Ducati rider took his penalty loops on laps nine and 10. Two tours later, Miller carved up the inside of Quartararo at the downhill La Chapelle right-hander to take a lead he would never lose.

Miller and Quartararo had engaged in a tight tussle for the lead in the early laps on slicks in the worsening conditions, the Ducati rider lucky to stay in the race when he locked up at the Blue esses complex at the end of lap five and ran off track.

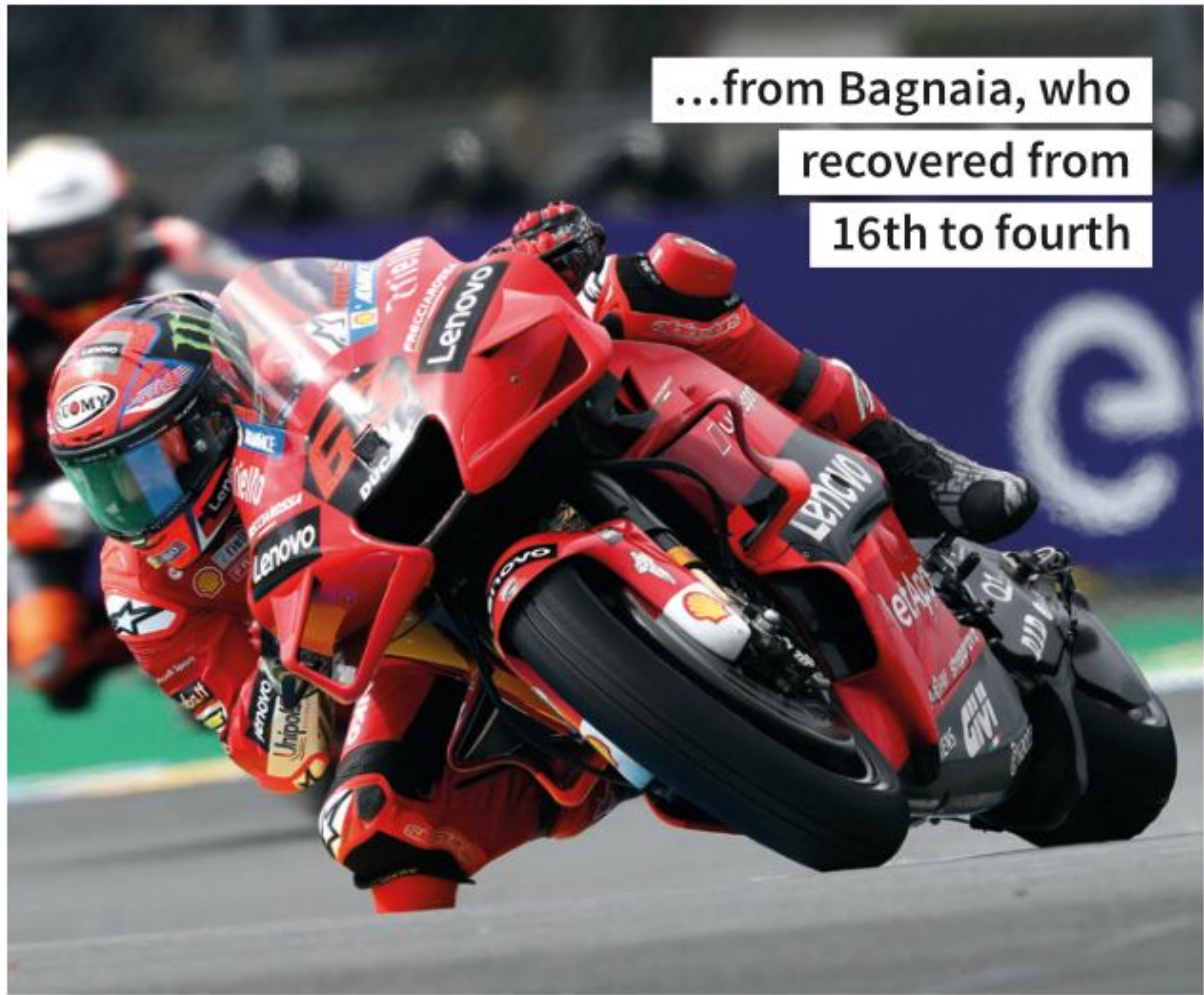
Quartararo struggled in the 2020 wet Le Mans race, and the drying conditions looked set to cause more problems for him as the Yamaha wants for traction in that scenario. Though the Pramac Ducati of Johann Zarco



Marquez keeps it all together (for now) as Rins falls in his wake



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eased past late on, Quartararo held onto third despite the conditions and his long-lap penalty, to prove to his rivals that his game has strengthened compared to 2020.

Francesco Bagnaia faced his first real test as championship leader. The Ducati rider was also hit with a double long-lap penalty for pitlane speeding, but used the conditions to recover from 16th in qualifying to fourth in the race, although lost his lead by a point to Quartararo.

Had the race remained dry, Maverick Vinales looked set for victory. The Yamaha man finally had a good start and took the lead just as the rain began to fall. But a mistake just before his stop dropped him out of the podium battle and he never regained his composure, coming home 10th after an otherwise confidence-inspiring weekend.

Between Vinales and Bagnaia came Danilo Petrucci, Alex Marquez, Takaaki Nakagami, Pol Espargaro and Iker Lecuona, Espargaro surviving first-lap contact with Franco Morbidelli in a clash both had contrasting views on. Marc Marquez rejoined after his crash but fell again late on as he lapped quicker than anyone. “Angry” at an “unnecessary” tumble, he has at least proven that the speed that took him to six MotoGP world titles is still in there.

LEWIS DUNCAN

RESULTS ROUND 5/19, LE MANS (FRA), 16 MAY, 27 LAPS – 70.212 MILES

POS	RIDER	TEAM	TIME
1	Jack Miller (AUS)	Ducati	47m25.473s
2	Johann Zarco (FRA)	Pramac Ducati	+3.970s
3	Fabio Quartararo (FRA)	Yamaha	+14.468s
4	Francesco Bagnaia (ITA)	Ducati	+16.172s
5	Danilo Petrucci (ITA)	Tech3 KTM	+21.430s
6	Alex Marquez (ESP)	LCR Honda	+23.509s
7	Takaaki Nakagami (JPN)	LCR Honda	+30.164s
8	Pol Espargaro (ESP)	Honda	+35.221s
9	Iker Lecuona (ESP)	Tech3 KTM	+40.432s
10	Maverick Vinales (ESP)	Yamaha	+40.577s
11	Valentino Rossi (ITA)	Petronas Yamaha	+42.198s
12	Luca Marini (ITA)	Avintia Ducati	+52.408s
13	Brad Binder (ZAF)	KTM	+59.377s
14	Enea Bastianini (ITA)	Avintia Ducati	+1m02.224s
15	Tito Rabat (ESP)	Pramac Ducati	+1m09.651s
16	Franco Morbidelli (ITA)	Petronas Yamaha	-4 laps
R	Marc Marquez (ESP)	Honda	17 laps-accident
R	Aleix Espargaro (ESP)	Aprilia	15 laps-technical
R	Miguel Oliveira (PRT)	KTM	12 laps-accident
R	Alex Rins (ESP)	Suzuki	12 laps-accident
R	Lorenzo Savadori (ITA)	Aprilia	11 laps-technical
R	Joan Mir (ESP)	Suzuki	4 laps-accident

Winner’s average speed 88.829mph. Fastest lap Quartararo 1m33.048s, 100.610mph.

QUALIFYING 2 1 Quartararo 1m32.600s; 2 Vinales 1m32.681s; 3 Miller 1m32.704s; 4 Morbidelli 1m32.766s; 5 Zarco 1m32.877s; 6 M Marquez 1m33.037s; 7 Nakagami 1m33.120s; 8 P Espargaro 1m33.150s; 9 Rossi 1m33.391s; 10 Oliveira 1m33.867s; 11 Savadori 1m34.258s; 12 Marini 1m34.265s.

QUALIFYING 1 Savadori 1m42.550s; Marini 1m43.352s; 13 A Espargaro 1m43.418s; 14 Mir 1m43.422s; 15 Rins 1m43.523s; 16 Bagnaia 1m43.530s; 17 Petrucci 1m43.857s; 18 Lecuona 1m44.324s; 19 A Marquez 1m45.146s; 20 Rabat 1m45.590s; 21 Binder 1m45.911s; 22 Bastianini 1m46.123s.

RIDERS’ CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Quartararo 80; 2 Bagnaia 79; 3 Zarco 68; 4 Miller 64; 5 Vinales 56; 6 Mir 49; 7 A Espargaro 35; 8 Morbidelli 33; 9 Nakagami 28; 10 P Espargaro 25; 11 Binder 24; 12 Rins 23; 13 Bastianini 20; 14 A Marquez 18; 15 Jorge Martin 17; 16 Petrucci 16; 17 M Marquez 16; 18 Stefan Bradl 11; 19 Rossi 9; 20 Oliveira 9; 21 Marini 9; 22 Lecuona 8; 23 Savadori 2; 24 Rabat 1.

MANUFACTURERS’ CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Ducati 110; 2 Yamaha 107; 3 Suzuki 53; 4 Honda 43; 5 KTM 38; 6 Aprilia 35.



WEEKEND
WINNERS

MOTO2
LE MANS (FRA)
Raul Fernandez
Ajo Motorsport (Kalex)

MOTO3
LE MANS (FRA)
Sergio Garcia (below)
Team Aspar (Gas Gas)



NEXT REPORT

ITALIAN GP
3 JUNE ISSUE

It wasn’t a case of third time lucky for the returning Marquez last weekend, but how will the Honda rider fair at Mugello, where he’s scored one win from his seven top-flight appearances?

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BRITISH GT/F3 All you need to know about the new season

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The battle to be sportscar stars

The key contenders for British GT glory ahead of Brands opener



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GT3
SEASON
PREVIEW

Lamborghini teams plan to stop a RAM raid on the title

With Silver pairings banned, Mercedes pair Buurman and Loggie could be in the box seat after their Pro-Am crown in 2020. But they face tough opposition

JAMES NEWBOLD

 PHOTOGRAPHY JEP 

After a season-long duel between its two Lamborghinis and the two RAM Racing Mercedes in 2020, Barwell Motorsport finally broke the Italian marque's British GT hoodoo by taking home the outright drivers' and teams' titles. But it wasn't victorious on all fronts.

Honours in the Pro-Am division went to Dan Shufflebottom's Merc squad, and that takes on a bigger significance this year, with the Silver pairings that dominated last year now banned. Yelmer Buurman and Ian Loggie didn't win a race outright last year,

but their Pro-Am title-winning campaign had fewer troughs than that of Barwell rivals Phil Keen and Adam Balon, who were twice overall winners. Buurman and Loggie were helped somewhat when team-mate Sam De Haan hit Balon into a spin in the Silverstone finale, but that day also marked Loggie's seasonal high point as he battled outright champion Rob Collard's Barwell Lambo for the race lead en route to second.

Starting with this weekend's 2021 opener at Brands Hatch, Buurman and Loggie will hope to parlay that Pro-Am crown into outright success, but they face familiar

opposition seeking to stop them in the shape of three strong Lamborghinis from Barwell and WPI Motorsport.

Familiar, yes, but also slightly different. After six years under the Barwell awning, series standout Keen has joined Michael Igoe's ambitious single-car WPI squad, which also welcomes ex-Barwell engineer Andy Richardson to the fold. That cements the credentials of a team that only made its British GT debut in 2019 with a Carrera Cup Porsche. Over at Barwell, meanwhile, Balon is now partnered by Collard's 2020 co-champion Sandy Mitchell. >>



“The combination is really working and I have no doubt that they’ll be in the mix from the word go”

The 21-year-old Mitchell has been promoted to full Lamborghini factory status after his 2020 successes, which included winning the Silver class at the Spa 24 Hours. He keeps his engineer from last year, Matt Beers, but in Balon has a very different challenge to that posed by working with Collard. While the tin-top veteran was totally new to GT racing, he needed little advice when it came to racecraft. On the other hand, Balon has two years of Huracan

experience under his belt, but finished last year low on confidence, which Barwell’s pre-season test programme set out to address.

Team boss Mark Lemmer admits that Barwell “didn’t get the best out of Adam at the end of last year”, but reckons his new partnership with Mitchell is already showing potential. “The set-up we ended up with for Adam and Keeny made it a difficult car

for Adam to drive, but luckily what he and Sandy want from the car is more aligned and he’s got a car he feels he can really attack with,” says Lemmer.

“He’s in such a different place. Adam was really keen to get back to Silverstone and he went 1.5s per lap faster than in quali at the end of last year. The combination is really working and I have no doubt they’ll be in the mix from the word go.”

The second car will be occupied by Barwell stalwart Leo Machitski, returning for a first full season in British GT since his 2006 title year alongside rapid Dane Dennis Lind, who shone in a part-season with WPI in 2019. Machitski, after winning 2018 and



Igoe became a winner last year and now has Keen alongside for title tilt



Buurman (right) and Loggie are defending Pro-Am title with RAM Mercedes

Barwell took advantage of opportunity to run its cars in the recent Brands GT Cup round



ENTRY LIST GT3 (PRO-AM UNLESS STATED)

NO	DRIVER	TEAM/CAR
1	Adam Balon/Sandy Mitchell	Barwell Motorsport/Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo
63	Leo Machitski/Dennis Lind	Barwell Motorsport/Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo
5	Stewart Proctor/Lewis Proctor	Balfe Motorsport/McLaren 720S GT3*
6	Ian Loggie/Yelmer Buurman	RAM Racing/Mercedes-AMG GT3
7	Andrew Howard/Jonny Adam	Beechdean AMR/Aston Martin Vantage GT3
8	Richard Neary/Sam Neary	Team ABBA Racing/Mercedes-AMG GT3*
11	Kelvin Fletcher/Martin Plowman	JRM Racing/Bentley Continental GT3
18	Michael Igoe/Phil Keen	WPI Motorsport/Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo
24	Lucky Khera/Ross Wylie	Simon Green Motorsport/Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo*
66	Nick Jones/Scott Malvern	Team Parker Racing/Porsche 911 GT3-R
77	Morgan Tillbrook/Marcus Clutton	Enduro Motorsport/McLaren 720S GT3

* Denotes Silver-Am entry

CALENDAR

DATE	EVENT
23 May	Brands Hatch GP (2 hours)
27 June	Silverstone (3 hours)
11 July	Donington Park (2 hours)
25 July	Spa (2 hours)
8 August	Snetterton (2x1 hour)
12 September	Oulton Park (2x1 hour)
17 October	Donington Park (2 hours)



Igoe hopes to benefit from co-driver stability in 2021

2019 GT World Challenge Europe Am class titles, had his desire to have another crack at the old-school UK tracks sparked by the continental series' visit to Imola last year. He has ex-WRT man Charles Hodge in his camp on engineering duties and, according to Lemmer, confidence is not something that crew will lack.

"Leo is super-confident," says Lemmer. "We know there's a learning curve for him, but he's a fast learner. When Dennis became available, we jumped on that and we're very lucky to have two pairings that are going to challenge."

With opportunities to test on the full Brands GP loop limited, both Barwell cars were among the smattering of British GT entrants on the grid for the GT Cup race there earlier this month. Lemmer says the outing "really achieved the objectives" of building confidence and familiarity.

WPI also contested that event, and Igoe, despite being stranded in the pits for race one due to "some freak things", heads into the new season on a high. "We're glad for [the technical issues] to happen there and hopefully now those problems are out of the way," he says. "We've worked hard, and Phil has fitted in really well. He's a big asset to the team and we've learned lots, so we're moving forward at quite a rate of knots."

After learning the ropes in 2019, Igoe emerged as a race winner at Donington

last year alongside Andrea Caldarelli, but he found the revolving door of Lambo factory drivers alongside him (four in total) didn't help with continuity. "There was no two weekends we had the same driver," he says.

Igoe admits that Keen's presence in the team brings pressure – "When you're comparing yourself to him, you're comparing yourself to the best" – but with a winter of testing under his belt is optimistic "it's going in the right direction".

"WPI Motorsport is a very new team, especially at this level against teams that have been around the championship for years," says Igoe. "So for us to come as a small team and to get everybody going in the right direction without missing anything along the way is quite a big ask, but we are definitely getting there."

Lemmer, who has run the Huracan since 2016, points out that the Lambo is "a cost-effective package" and benefits from "a brilliant level of support, especially for some of these new teams coming in". But while Lamborghini has numerical superiority – a fourth car from Simon Green Motorsport is entered in the fledgling Silver-Am sub-class – that doesn't mean it will translate onto the track, where the less aero-dependent Mercedes has often proven the most Am-friendly package.

As for RAM, a second car will be entered at selected events starting at Brands this

weekend, with De Haan joined by Bronze-graded historics racer James Cottingham. At races where the team is only running one car, more focus will inevitably be drawn onto Buurman and Loggie – "I think it's probably a positive thing for them," concedes Shufflebottom – who retain the services of Portugal-based engineering whizz Alex Zochling.

With the overall title now at stake, Shufflebottom reckons it will make a "huge difference" to RAM's drivers, but also ups the incentive for all parties to deliver. "We want to win it, Ian wants to win it, Yelmer wants to win it, so this is what we've got to focus on," says Shufflebottom. "Ian has been doing British GT for quite a long time, he knows what needs to be done to win, and when you can't win races you've got to make sure you score points. Yelmer is the same – he's got so much experience and in qualifying is always able to turn it on and get a lap. Together they should be pretty strong."

Throw into the mix a return of the Jonny Adam-Andrew Howard axis that yielded titles in 2013 and 2015 at Beechdean AMR, the race-winning JRM Bentley back after a year's hiatus, and the first full-time Porsche entry since 2014 with 2017 title-winner Team Parker Racing, and there's every reason to expect 2021 to be a thriller. ❦

➔ P50 GT4 PREVIEW

The sequel to a thriller

The GT4 battle is wide open in the absence of last year's title protagonists, and it could be the parties that battled out the ultra-close 2018 crown in contention

JAMES NEWBOLD

PHOTOGRAPHY JEP



motorsport
IMAGES

The absence of two-time and reigning GT4 champion TF Sport and its closest 2020 challenger, HHC Motorsport, means British GT's secondary category has a somewhat different complexion this year. But numbers are up, with a healthy seven manufacturers on the grid for Brands Hatch.

For an indicator of what to expect, you could do worse than look back to the 2018 GT4 title battle for inspiration. That year featured a three-way thriller played out between two Century Motorsport BMWs and the leading lights of the new McLaren Driver Development Programme, then fielded by Tolman Motorsport. It may be fanciful to expect two points to split the leading trio this term, but there's every

reason to expect Nathan Freke's Fenny Compton-based Century squad to once again do battle with McLaren's young chargers, that programme now run by Team Rocket RJN after a race-winning GT3 campaign in 2020 with Michael O'Brien and James Baldwin.

Assuming that both adapt well to Century's well-proven BMW M4, series returnee Will Burns and Gus Burton will be an evenly matched frontrunning pair. The duo won over half of the 19 Ginetta GT4 Supercup races last year – five apiece – as category veteran Burns edged Ginetta Junior graduate Burton to the title.

Freke's courting of Burns resulted in a test planned at Silverstone in November, only for fog to cause its cancellation. Burns then accepted an offer from Aspetto Motorsport

to race its new Ginetta G56 – “Because I’ve always been in a Ginetta, I thought it made sense for me to continue that partnership” – but was released from the deal when the team struggled to find him a co-driver, and was quickly snapped up to join Burton, an 18-year-old who Freke hopes will be a candidate to join BMW's junior roster.

“I’ve known Nathan all the way through the Supercup years,” says Burns, “and I always wanted to go with Century but the opportunity never presented itself. It was easy for me to familiarise myself with that car – obviously it being front-engine, rear-wheel drive, it’s the same characteristics as the Ginetta. Gus is an extremely quick kid as well, so I think we’re going to make a strong pairing.”

It's the best line-up Century has put together since it finished 1-2 in 2018, when Jack Mitchell, aided by Dean Macdonald, edged Ben Tuck and Ben Green by a single point. And with the M4 boasting an upgrade package including a revamped traction control system that's expected to improve driveability at the end of a stint on worn



Burns pipped Burton to 2020
Ginetta GT4 Supercup title...



...and the pair now share a
Century Motorsport BMW,
pictured in testing last year



Neville has high hopes
for Team Rocket McLarens



Williams and Fielding won
last GT4 race they entered
at Donington 2019 finale

tyres, a title challenge is expected.

After a year's COVID-enforced hiatus, the McLaren DDP is back with a quartet of drivers anxious to make up for spending 2020 on the sidelines. Back in 2018, O'Brien and Charlie Fagg finished just two points shy of Mitchell, while in 2019 the rapid James Dorlin and Josh Smith were dogged by bad luck.

It was exclusively an enterprise to blood British talent back then, but Katie Milner is the only Brit of the current intake. The former Ginetta racer joins Australian Harry Hayek, who has experience of the UK circuits from an abortive BRDC British Formula 3 Championship foray in 2017, while Swiss Alain Valente and Moroccan Michael Benyahia in the other car both have experience of the McLaren from Germany's ADAC GT4 series in 2019. They won a race apiece in that contest, so they will be the expected frontrunners.

Even so, the daughter of 2002-03 British rally champion Jonny Milner believes that she is now a "completely different driver" after a year spent working with McLaren

"If we turned up at Brands hoping for a top 10, that wouldn't be the right way to approach it"

sim partner iZone, and that she can compete with the best at the sharp end. "It wasn't nice to not be racing for a year, but the lockdowns just helped me really focus on training," Milner says. "I'm the fittest that I've ever been and also eating right and being on the sim more. In the time we've had we've all come on massively."

Bob Neville's RJN team may be new to the 570S GT4, but it has no shortage of GT4 competition experience to fall back on, with the 2011 Blancpain GT4 Cup and 2009 European GT4 teams titles under its belt. In its most recent GT4 foray in 2018 (its last season before the tie-up with Jenson Button and Chris Buncombe under the Team Rocket name), RJN ran Martin Plowman and Kelvin Fletcher close to the Pro-Am title. "We've got many GT4 podiums, wins and championships behind us so we're not uncomfortable —

we like GT4," says Neville, whose team welcomes back engineer Simon Pollock from the factory Aston Martin World Endurance Championship set-up.

RJN has expanded to enter a third car for 2019 McLaren DDP alumnus Jordan Collard and ex-Speedworks Toyota driver James Kell. Collard, who was unfortunate not to win the title last year with the HHC McLaren squad, is expected to be a leading light. "We're expecting [Collard] to be our benchmark, and we're delighted to have him in the team for that very reason," says Neville, whose team is also running the JBXE Extreme E programme. "He's got the experience, he's got the speed and he's got the knowledge of the car. The work we've done with him so far has worked out well."

The best bet for stopping a 2018 rerun is likely to come from Steller Performance's Audi R8, with Sennan Fielding and Richard Williams returning to GT4 after selected outings in GT3 last year, because their all-Silver status means they're now ineligible for the senior class. They won on their last GT4 outing at Donington in 2019, and Williams has every reason to expect to hit the ground running.

"The great thing about Sennan and I working together is that we do like the car the same way," says Williams, "so we get consistent feedback which has really helped to unlock more performance. If we turned up at Brands hoping for a top 10 finish, that wouldn't be the right way to approach it. We go there expecting to win and that's what we're out to do." ❧

ENTRY LIST GT4 (SILVER UNLESS STATED)

NO	DRIVER	TEAM / CAR
2	James Kell/Jordan Collard	Team Rocket RJN/McLaren 570S GT4
3	Alain Valente/Michael Benyahia	Team Rocket RJN/McLaren 570S GT4
4	Harry Hayek/Katie Milner	Team Rocket RJN/McLaren 570S GT4
9	Chris Salkeld/Andrew Gordon-Colebrooke	Century Motorsport/BMW M4 GT4*
57	Will Burns/Gus Burton	Century Motorsport/BMW M4 GT4
15	John Ferguson/Scott McKenna	Speedworks Motorsport/Toyota GR Supra GT4*
25	Dave Whitmore/Jake Giddings	Ciceley Motorsport/Mercedes-AMG GT4*
27	Matt Topham/Darren Turner	Newbridge Motorsport/Aston Martin Vantage GT4**
40	Nick Halstead/Jamie Stanley	Fox Motorsport/McLaren 570S GT4*
42	Richard Williams/Sennan Fielding	Steller Motorsport/Audi R8 LMS GT4
56	Mark Sansom/Charlie Robertson	Assetto Motorsport/Ginetta G56 GT4*
61	Will Moore/Matt Cowley	Academy Motorsport/Ford Mustang GT4
90	Jack Brown/Ashley Marshall	Balfe Motorsport/McLaren 570S GT4

* Denotes Pro-Am entry ** Missing Brands Hatch

NEXT WEEK

BRITISH GT REPORT 27 MAY ISSUE

All the news and action from the two-hour Brands Hatch season opener.



BRITISH F3
SEASON
PREVIEW

Newcomers versus old guard

There's plenty to get excited about as the 2021 BRDC British F3 Championship begins at Brands Hatch this weekend

STEFAN MACKLEY

PHOTOGRAPHY JEP  motorsport
IMAGES

Exciting rookies and new teams promise to make the 2021 BRDC British Formula 3 Championship an intriguing prospect, but it's a returning face who's likely to be considered the favourite for the title.

Ayrton Simmons is no stranger to British F3. He finished third in the standings in 2019, and had further outings in 2018 and 2020, last year notching up two wins on the Brands Hatch Grand Prix Circuit, which is where the season begins this weekend.

After a truncated Euroformula Open campaign last year, the 2019 Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Award finalist intends to compete in the full 2021 British F3 season with Chris Dittmann Racing

in a bid to reinvigorate his career.

"A lot of people will see it as a sideways move or a step down from Euroformula, but I'm the person that's most in touch with my driver development," says the 20-year-old.

"It's the sensible thing to do after not bringing great results last year in Euroformula. I was struggling a little bit, finishing top seven every race, which is OK but not what we wanted and not what we needed. I think this year is an opportunity to show up again [in British F3] knowing you can win a race and win the championship, which is important for me.

"This year compared to 2019 I'm a completely different driver. I'm a lot more confident, I'm a lot more skilled and a lot stronger mentally. If I managed to get a

top-three two years ago, I don't see why we can't take the title."

While conceding that anything less than the championship would be a disappointment and that the tag of favourite is firmly on his shoulders, Simmons doesn't see the pressure as a negative.

"This is good pressure, there's nothing bad about it," he adds. "Once that helmet's on everything disappears and the only thing in my mind is the job I've got in hand. You can call it pressure, but for me it's also motivation, and it's a good thing that people are considering you the favourite."

While both Simmons and Dittmann are proven entities in the championship, a lack of pre-season testing could potentially be their undoing as the likes of Carlin and



Simmons returns with CDR
after finishing third with
the squad in 2019

Hitech Grand Prix — powerhouse squads in junior single-seaters — have racked up the mileage. Carlin has taken three British F3 titles in the past four years, but even with Double R Racing — the only other team to claim the title since 2016 — pulling out of the championship, there's no guarantee that the squad will claim another title, especially as it fields a trio of rookies.

Even so, Zak O'Sullivan — who agonisingly missed out on the British F4 title last term — has shown great speed in pre-season testing and will more than likely be in the mix for wins. The 16-year-old has “turned the book on that [F4] chapter”, beginning when he visited the Carlin factory



Elite founder Eddie
Ives and Lebbon
are new to British F3



O'Sullivan will race
with Carlin again –
this time in British F3

“You can call it pressure but for me it's motivation. It's a good thing people consider you the favourite”

the day after his final-round heartbreak to have a seat fitting in the F3 car. He's not setting any particular goals this early in the season, and is focused on adapting to his new car as quickly as possible. “In British F3 the qualifying is always so close,” he says. “The whole field can be covered by half a second at some circuits, which is outrageous, so that's going to be quite a hard thing to nail, especially with the tight tracks and a lot more aero.

“The dirty air is quite a bad factor in British F3, especially around Brands Hatch GP — it's one of the worst circuits for that. The second-year drivers, that's going to be a place that's going to help them. It's quite a tricky track, you need a lot of confidence and we don't really get to test there at all. My goal [is to] try and get the qualifying sorted, because as I go up the ladder that's going to be something that gets more and more important.”

While 13 of the 19 drivers confirmed for the opening round are completely new to BRDC British F3, there are some familiar faces returning.

Bart Horsten competed with Lanar Racing last year, achieving 10th in the standings. For 2021 the 19-year-old

Australian has moved to Hitech, which came close to the title in 2020, despite it being the squad's maiden season in the category.

“I feel that when things don't go right you learn a lot more than when things do go right, and those weaknesses become a lot more obvious,” he says. “I think it was an extremely tough season for me last year, and as a result I've learned a lot and I feel a lot stronger for this season.”

It's not just new drivers appearing in the championship this year, but also teams, with two new squads joining the grid. Arden International has taken part in almost every junior single-seater category over the years, and will compete in BRDC British F3 for the first time with Frederick Lubin and Alex Connor, who both step up from the Banbury operation's British F4 team.

Elite Motorsport, which has its roots firmly in Ginettas, will make its first foray into single-seaters and will have 2020 Ginetta Junior champion Tom Lebbon — who claimed his title with Elite — on its roster.

While new to the series and lacking experience against the likes of Carlin and even Douglas Motorsport or Fortec Motorsport, there's every chance that both new squads could spring a surprise.

The slightly tweaked weekend format this year — the grids for races one and two will now be based on a driver's best and second-best qualifying times, with race three's grid determined by a reverse of the fastest qualifying times — and the addition of a teams' championship will also add a new dynamic to what promises to be another strong year for the championship. 🏁



Second-year driver Horsten
has joined Hitech GP
and could be a threat

NEXT WEEK

BRITISH F3 REPORT 27 MAY ISSUE

Race report and all the news from the Brands Hatch season opener.

EQUIPE TO ORGANISE AND PROMOTE ITS OWN EVENTS

EQUIPE CLASSIC RACING

Equipe Classic Racing will organise and promote its own race meetings in 2022 as it becomes increasingly difficult for other clubs to accommodate the Equipe portfolio of series within their events.

Equipe has featured at a variety of club meetings in recent seasons, most notably with the MG Car Club, but it has also appeared at Aston Martin Owners Club, Vintage Sports-Car Club, Bentley Drivers Club and Masters Historic Racing fixtures. But, having become a registered Motorsport UK club in its own right in 2019 and introduced Pre '63, 50s and Libre grids alongside its popular GTS series, Equipe has decided to take the step to becoming a race promoter.

"It's come about because we've grown, and it's difficult to take a volume of time off others as a guest," said Equipe partner John Pearson. "It wasn't part of a grand plan; we just needed to secure our own future. Our intention remains the same: to provide affordable club racing to passionate amateur drivers.

"Circuits are starting to look at 2022, so that's why we're doing this now. We've invested quite a lot of money in our online driver entry platforms and hospitality as we've grown."

Pearson stressed that "we really



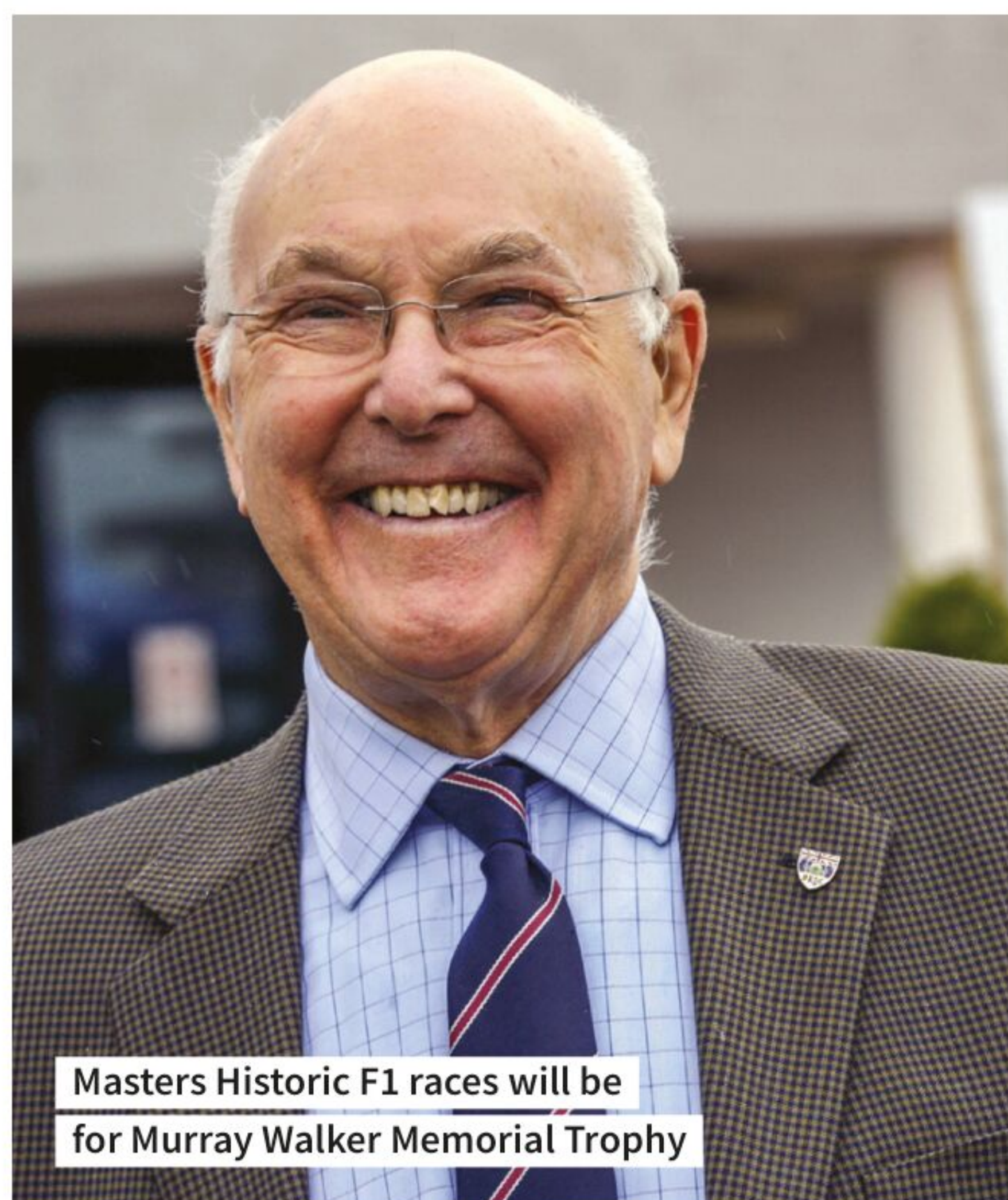
appreciate the support we've had from lots of clubs over the years", and has not ruled out continuing to appear at other organisers' events. "Masters is a good example – we've got two Equipe Libre grids on the Brands Hatch GP circuit with them at the end of May," he added.

Pearson said he and his partner Rob Cull are in talks with a number of other grids that could be guest series at Equipe

events next year, and have already confirmed one. They are beginning work on a schedule of 2022 dates, including one and two-day meetings.

After a surge in interest for its season opener at an MGCC event at Brands Hatch in April, Equipe added two extra GTS races, meaning it ran a total of four double-headers over the two days.

STEPHEN LICKORISH



Murray tribute at The Classic

SILVERSTONE CLASSIC

The life of legendary Formula 1 commentator Murray Walker will be celebrated at The Silverstone Classic later this year.

The broadcasting icon passed away in March, aged 97, and the Silverstone event's two headline races on 30 July-1 August for Masters Historic Formula 1 cars from the 1970s and early 1980s will compete for the Murray Walker

Memorial Trophy.

Walker always had a special affection for Silverstone and, even in his later years, was an enthusiastic visitor to The Classic. In 2018, he was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award by The Classic's event director Nick Wigley.

"Everyone in motorsport loved Murray Walker and we really wanted both to celebrate his remarkable career and to thank him for all the fantastic

entertainment he provided," said Wigley. "It's fair to say that many of those coming to The Classic owe their love of historic racing to the infectious enthusiasm spread by Murray back in the day.

"The Murray Walker Memorial Trophy for Masters Historic Formula 1 will give us all the perfect opportunity to pay tribute to a truly unique and forever cherished personality."

PAUL LAWRENCE

Ex-BTCC racer Proctor returns to competition

FOCUS CUP

Former British Touring Car racer Mark Proctor has returned to competition for the first time in over nine years this season in the Focus Cup.

The 52-year-old Proctor raced in the Independent class of the BTCC in the mid-2000s, and later moved into the Ginetta G50 Cup, where he halted his 2009 campaign after being injured in an Oulton Park crash. He competed after that in the Renault UK Clio Cup.

With his son Senna unable to secure a drive on the BTCC grid this year, Proctor Sr decided to get back behind the wheel himself. He made his return at Donington Park last month, taking a best result of sixth, and picked up a podium at Silverstone last weekend.

Proctor said he is still getting used to the turbodiesel machines and that the arrive-and-drive series first caught his



Proctor took a podium in second Focus Cup race

WALKER

attention at the Autosport International show. He then decided to join himself after a neighbour signed up to the category.

"A couple of years ago, at the Autosport show, I saw them and said to Senna, 'They look good value,'" said Proctor. "Then Lewis Ryan, who lives in the next village, said he's going to have a go in them. It's a great championship – everything's very level and there's some good people in it. It's laid back and everyone gets on."

STEPHEN LICKORISH



Gauthier-Thornton was instantly quick, taking three class podiums

RICHINGS

Prize winner impresses on debut

CLUBMANS SPORTS PROTOTYPES

Prize winner Mathieu Gauthier-Thornton impressed on his car racing debut in the Clubmans Sports Prototype championship at Silverstone last weekend, taking three class podiums.

Gauthier-Thornton has secured a funded season in the Phantom P94 after emerging victorious in a competition run by former Clubmans champion Alex Champkin that featured sim racing and karting.

After a COVID-19 delay, ex-Nissan GT Academy competitor Gauthier-Thornton made his real-life bow in Northamptonshire and was

immediately on the pace, only losing the CSP2 lead late on in the opener when rain arrived and he was on slicks. He then followed that by again finishing runner-up in the other two races.

"It's so much fun – the most fun I've ever had!" said Gauthier-Thornton, who added that he found the racecraft to be "quite similar" between virtual and real-life competition: "Going into Copse flat-out blew my mind."

He "didn't have any expectations of myself" heading into the weekend, and was therefore delighted with the results he was able to achieve.

Champkin will again run the competition this year, and entries are open.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

IN THE HEADLINES

WALDER REMEMBERED

A minute's silence was held at Loton Park last Sunday to remember journalist and commentator Eddie Walder, who died over the winter. Several hundred competitors, teams and marshals gathered for a socially distanced tribute to a popular member of the British hillclimbing fraternity during the opening round of the 2021 championship.

HALL GOES HILLCLIMBING

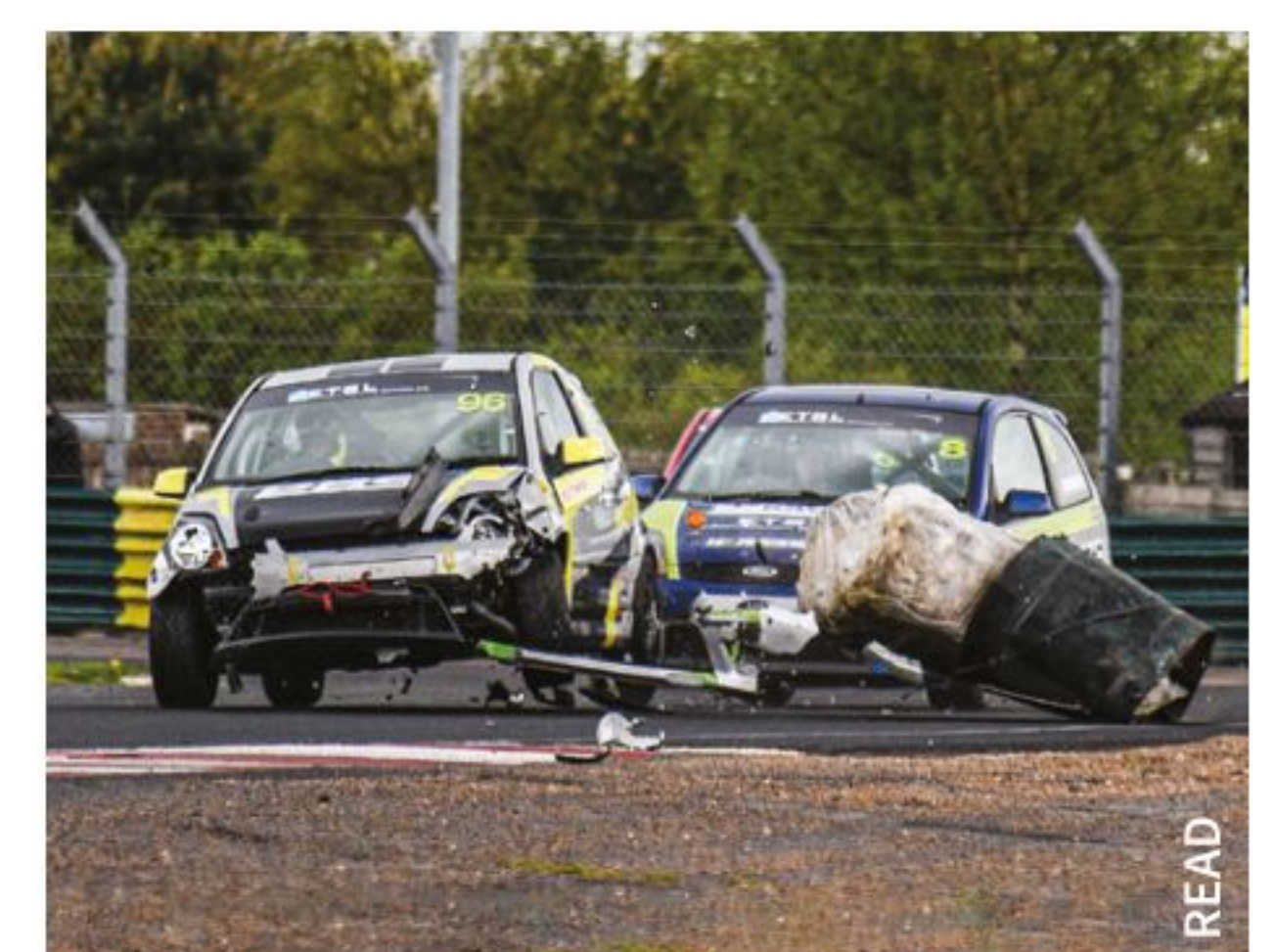
Charles Hall, a Formula Vauxhall Lotus frontrunner in the late 1990s, is trying his hand at hillclimbing. Hall took his single-seater career to the US, but later suffered a serious road accident. More recently, he has raced with the 750 Motor Club and won the Bikesports title last year. From there, Empire single-seater builder Bill Chaplain offered Hall some events in the hillclimb machine usually run by Maltese Zach Zammit.

LEWIS ON SPORTING TRIAL

Racer and team owner Jonathan Lewis changed disciplines on Saturday when he made his historic sporting trials debut in a Cannon. Partnered by his wife Sam, Lewis tackled the Long Compton event. "I finished and I'm only covered in a small amount of cow dung," he said. "It was really hard to start with when it was wet. I had to drive completely differently to what I'm used to. It was good fun and we'll definitely do some more. It's a great sport!"

BECKETT HELPED BACK OUT

Sam Beckett said it was thanks to the efforts of the entire ST-XR Challenge paddock that he got his car repaired for last weekend's second Croft race. Beckett suffered front-end and suspension damage to his Ford Fiesta ST150 after hitting a Recticel barrier (below), which had been clipped into the middle of the track in the opening race. "It was a championship effort – everyone in the paddock helped us get the parts we needed," said Beckett, who finished 17th.



READ

Wood to race ex-Jarier and Laffite F2 March

HISTORIC F2

Multiple Clubmans champion Clive Wood enjoyed his first test run in his newly acquired Formula 2 March-BMW 782 on Silverstone's Grand Prix circuit last week ahead of debuting it there this weekend.

French F1 stars Jean-Pierre Jarier and Jacques Laffite raced chassis 16 for compatriot Pierre Maublanc's Sperry Univac-backed MRS equipe in the 1978 European championship. Jarier also drove it for Jean-Louis Lafosse's spin-off in the end-of-season South American Temporada series, finishing fourth in Buenos Aires.

Le Mans driver Michel Pignard subsequently hillclimbed the car, also previously raced in Historic F2 by Sean Walker, Frank Sytner and Martin Stretton.

"A 782 has always been my dream car and did not disappoint," said Wood. "It's very different to the Chevron B34 and B29 I've driven. The B34 feels planted, but the March's handling is even more solid, and more physical. I really noticed the aero."

"The BMW M12 engine feels very powerful after BDGs, but has a narrower



Clubmans ace Wood enjoyed first March 782 test at Silverstone

power band. You have to keep it singing from 7000 to 9000rpm."

Wood, who ran the championship-winning Pine City Racing Formula Ford 1600 team in the 1980s, has competed in Classic FF2000 for many years. Having enjoyed a Classic F3 sampler at the end of 2019, he will continue to compete in the category, hopefully alongside daughter Pippa Tanner-Wood, who continues to race a Mallock.

Wood's single-seaters are run by Lifetime Racing, which pools the vast experience of Dan Eagling and his father Glenn, who raced FF1600 and F3 in the early 1970s and still pedals FFords and an F2 GRD rapidly. One of historic racing's quickest and most versatile racers, Eagling Jr is another Clubmans champ who progressed to GTs internationally, having been a technician on David Sears's Super Nova F3000 team.

MARCUS PYE

F4 winner Bearman joins Fortec in British F3

BRDC BRITISH F3

Briton Oliver Bearman will compete part-time in the BRDC British F3 Championship this season with Fortec Motorsport, alongside his campaigns in German and Italian F4.

The 16-year-old – a race winner in both F4 series last year after a successful spell in karting, including European and World titles at Junior X30 level – will take part in selected

rounds of British F3, beginning with the opening event this weekend at Brands Hatch.

"The relationship with the whole team is fantastic, and the car itself is so much fun to drive," said Bearman. "I'm looking forward to kicking things off with this weekend at Brands Hatch GP."

Fortec team manager Oliver Dutton said: "Driver development is one area of the sport our family-run team



Bearman will compete in F3 events that don't clash with his F4 bids

excels at, so we're very excited to play a role in helping Ollie with the next steps in his career after a very successful start."

Fortec has also confirmed that Mikkel Grundtvig has

signed up for the full British F3 season. The 18-year-old Dane, who has raced F4 in his homeland and France, was due to drive in British F4 last year prior to the pandemic.

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West Suffolk College students
have already got their donor Aygo

Strong interest in delayed Student Motorsport Challenge

CITYCAR CUP

The Student Motorsport Challenge contest within the CityCar Cup has been postponed until next season, but organisers are encouraged by the amount of interest the series has received from educators.

The division pits teams from colleges or universities against each other, with the students able to either build or run ready-made Citroen C1, Peugeot 107 and Toyota Aygo cars. The challenge had been due to launch this year, but the “crippling” effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on education has led to a delay.

“Students have barely been in – we were quite optimistic but, with the best will in the world, they couldn’t do it for this year,” said Student Motorsport founder John Paul Latham.

Attention has now turned to 2022, and Latham has built an Aygo himself in order to produce a guide for the colleges. West Suffolk College has already begun work on a car, while more than 10 others have expressed interest in the category.

“People are saying nothing has brought motorsport and education so close together,” said Latham. “I’m really pleased with the feedback we’ve had that this is really going to benefit education and motorsport.”

West Suffolk College lecturer Leon Wilde added: “The Student Motorsport Challenge not only meets the needs of the students but equips them for real industry scenarios. It gives them the practical skills needed to craft a racing car, and builds teamwork and ambition.”

STEPHEN LICKORISH

IN THE HEADLINES

SOMERFIELD’S 10TH SEASON

Ginetta GT4 Supercup regular Reece Somerfield is set to be on the grid for a 10th season this year. The former Caterham ace has secured two wins and 11 podiums during that time. He finished seventh in last year’s standings, despite only completing a part-season, and will again run as a privateer entry in 2021.

MORE LIVESTREAMED EVENTS

Two more clubs have revealed plans to livestream events this season. The Classic Sports Car Club will offer full coverage of its Donington Park meeting next weekend and its August Snetterton event. Meanwhile, the British Racing & Sports Car Club is due to offer livestreams from 14 fixtures this year, culminating with the 50th Formula Ford Festival.

BARKER’S MINI JCW BID

Oliver Barker (below) plans to contest a full season of the Mini Challenge after impressing in a one-off outing at Snetterton last year. The 2017 Radical Challenge champion took a best result of sixth in Norfolk in 2020 with Jamsport, and will now be back with Excelr8. “Testing has gone better than I expected and we have been posting some very competitive lap times,” he said.



De Haan and Cottingham agree late RAM Merc deal

BRITISH GT

Leading British GT squad RAM Racing will have two Mercedes-AMG GT3s on the grid for this weekend’s Brands Hatch opener, after agreeing a one-off deal to run Sam De Haan and James Cottingham.

Autosport understands that De Haan, the 2019 Pro-Am champion and overall runner-up for the past two years, was planning to return for a full

season prior to series organiser SRO’s announcement that it was ditching the Silver-Silver class in a bid to reinstate Pro-Am as the top division.

It meant that Silver-rated De Haan would have had to partner with a Bronze to continue in British GT’s new Silver-Am subclass. With the 25-year-old signing up to the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup with RAM, team boss Dan Shufflebottom moved to sign

another pairing to join Pro-Am champions Yelmer Buurman and Ian Loggie. But, when that deal fell through late in the winter, it appeared that the team would only run the single car.

Following a test at Silverstone, De Haan and historic ace Cottingham, 37, will enter the two-hour season opener, with Cottingham stating that he felt quickly at ease with the car.

JAMES NEWBOLD



GTWCE machine will also
be used in British GT opener

Ray Allen 1943-2021

OBITUARY

Ray Allen, who died last week aged 77, was intrinsically linked with Brands Hatch and the close-knit community centred on Motor Circuit Developments boss John Webb, its resident Motor Racing Stables school and entrepreneurial racer/team chief Jackie Epstein.

Allen caught the racing bug with MRS. He first competed in 1966 with one of its old 1000cc F3 Brabham BT15s, but sprang to fame on 2 July 1967 as the winner of the first ever standalone Formula Ford race, on the Brands club circuit.

Allen dominated MCD's inaugural Formula 100 sportscar championship in 1970 in a Royale RP4. While the series lasted just two seasons – Tom Pryce blitzed 1971's sequel – both champions became part of the Brands family.

When FAtlantic debuted this side of the pond in 1971, Allen was given



Allen went down in history by winning the first standalone Formula Ford race at Brands Hatch



a leg-up into it. Saddling a Royale RP8, powered by 1600cc Ford twin-cam and BDA engines, he won three races and finished the year fourth overall.

Formula 5000, which he dovetailed in 1971, was more up Allen's street. Driving the Team Trojan Pink Stamps McLaren M10B, he finished seventh in the table. Having improved to sixth with the McLaren and the Servis Surtees TS11 in 1972, his star waned the following year largely through unreliability, a legacy of an inadequate budget.

Ray competed in two non-

championship F1 races, finishing sixth in the 1971 Race of Champions at Brands Hatch aboard Frank Williams's March 701, but retired from Hockenheim's Jochen Rindt Memorial event.

Allen subsequently worked as an instructor at Brands and was a friendly face at historic events. Fifty years to the day after his FF1600 victory, he presided over the Historic Sports Car Club's Formula Ford celebration there in 2017.

In January 2019, when the club marked F5000's 50th anniversary at Autosport International, he enjoyed the reunion with many former racing rivals.

MARCUS PYE

Sikkens and Khera share Ferrari wins at Brands

FERRARI CHALLENGE

It might have been an all-blue affair for the FA Cup final at Wembley, but Brands Hatch was unmistakably red as the 2021 Ferrari Challenge UK got under way.

In Saturday's race, held on the Indy circuit, polesitter Han Sikkens took control and built

up an advantage before a downpour resulted in large puddles of standing water, forcing the safety car into action.

Once the track was clear, Sikkens resumed his pace, leaving Lucky Khera, John Dhillon and Paul Hogarth to fight for the remaining podium places. Graham de Zille just

outpaced Laurent de Meeus for Coppa Shell honours.

It was more of the same, weather-wise, on Sunday, but this time reigning champion Khera seized the advantage with a stunning pole position lap as conditions worsened. In the race – around the Grand Prix Circuit – he soon pulled clear from Dhillon, who also

built a gap to the chasing pack. De Zille pipped Sikkens for third, taking his second class win of the weekend.

On a healthy grid for Pirelli Ferrari Formula Classic, Chris Butler in his 328 GTB took a hat-trick of wins, despite qualifying down the order for race one.

STEVE HINDLE

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A spectacle to wow spectators

There's a bumper entry as the HSCC's Silverstone International Trophy is back and the return of fans to circuits is another reason to be cheerful

MARCUS PYE

Time was when the BRDC's International Trophy event at Silverstone was a non-championship Formula 1 race. Rooted in 1949, when Alberto Ascari won for Ferrari, it was second only in importance to the British Grand Prix – whether staged there, at Aintree or Brands Hatch – on the domestic calendar. Thus it attracted large crowds to Northamptonshire, and long-term title sponsorship from the *Daily Express* that promoted and covered the meeting, over which household name drivers often competed in supporting races too. I first attended in the mid-1960s, where watching great champions Jack Brabham, Graham Hill, Jim Clark, Denny Hulme and Jackie Stewart helped sow my love of the sport.

This weekend's International Trophy retrospective, under the auspices of the Historic Sports Car Club, founded in 1966, has been a staple of the Silverstone-based organisation's programme for many years. Together with its Legends of Brands Hatch Superprix in July and Oulton Park Gold Cup in August, it enjoys joint top billing over the domestic season, showcasing the current iteration of the Grand Prix circuit, a world away from the flat wartime airfield course on which superstars played in 1949, itself very different to Silverstone's original 1948 layout. Intriguingly, in that second year, there was even a chicane at Club!

I'm excited to be back on commentating and reporting duty

“Socialising in fresh air at a race track, with a beer at lunchtime, became a habit”

from Saturday morning, for several reasons. Not least is the return of spectators, for which national motorsport has been yearning since the season belatedly began last month. It's not like the great Silverstone International of yore when we set off at dawn, arrived two hours before the first race and were entertained by hardened fans constructing personal grandstands from scaffolding and planks to see over the crowds at their favourite vantage points. Ours was Stowe, where – in those pre-Wing days – the sightline stretched impressively from Chapel Curve and extended via the Hangar Straight, past us, through the subsequent right-hander at Club and up through the flat-out left kink at Abbey, which was towards half of the 2.9-mile track.

Attendance at most club events now tends to be the families and friends of competitors, locals who pitch up if the weather

looks pleasant and some diehard enthusiasts. Yet, a more reliable barometer of a meeting's quality is the number of marshals who sign-on. The HSCC is supported by a particularly strong 'orange army', largely because those on-post enjoy being close to a fantastic diversity of cars, which transports them back to their youth. Marshalling a circuit of Silverstone's full 3.66-mile length effectively is dependent upon them, and a wave from drivers on cooling-down laps goes a long way to making their vital hobby more enjoyable. A friendly paddock, scrutineering and race office experience are other differentiators for competitors and officials working behind the scenes.

Back in the 1970s, when I was first able to travel to events independently and thus started marshalling, the spectator throng for certain club meetings was greater than at others. Certain drivers, notably Gerry Marshall, even boasted a fan following! Sure, there were fewer clubbies than there are now – almost all one-day affairs with six to eight races – and far fewer leisure activities to distract punters. No Sunday shopping meant many were kicking their heels unless they went to a sporting event, fishing, or to the pub. Thus corralling like-minded friends and socialising in fresh air at a race track, with a beer at lunchtime, became a habit for many.

Now, incentives for promoters who hire circuits to bring spectators through the gates are rare. The costs of putting an event on are passed directly to competitors, amortised by entry fees across daunting full-on programmes featuring double or triple-headers for some race groups. Conversely, the benefits of welcoming visitors in number are still evident at the Oulton Park Gold Cup, which MotorSport Vision advertises widely and an historically receptive North West community responds. With hundreds of classic cars packing the bank outside the Fogarty Moss Centre, with a panoramic vista over Cascades, the descent from Hill Top to Knickerbrook and the climb up Clay Hill, buzzing paddock atmosphere and an active rally stage, it's a great day out!

There is fine racing to be enjoyed elsewhere, though. Returning to Silverstone, there is something for everybody. From the HSCC's traditional Road Sports miscellanies through frenetic Formula Ford to exceptional Guards Trophy and Thundersports fields, the club's in-house portfolio is swelled by a twin-pronged Historic F2 flashback giving a flavour of the International Trophy's 1970s epoch. The return of the visiting GT & Sports Car Cup may provide the spectacle of the weekend, however, with a magnificent multi-marque pack headed by snarling Jaguar E-types (these cars will be competing for a special trophy to mark the model's 60th anniversary), AC Cobras and Austin-Healeys shaping Sunday afternoon's one-hour contest. If the past 13 months' COVID-19 lockdowns have whetted your appetite, or you've not been racing for a long time, it'll be worth the trip. Make it this year. 🏁



Come rain or shine,
Brewer was the man to
beat in Mazda MX-5s

Brewer's Croft MX-5 round hits the right notes

CROFT
BRSCC
15-16 MAY

Having waited three years to take his first Mazda MX-5 Championship victory, Jack Brewer left Croft with three under his belt as he dominated the opening round of the season.

Competing at the North Yorkshire circuit for the first time, the Tucker Motorsport driver was immediately on the pace as he qualified on pole and fended off a late charge from Michael Knibbs to take a comprehensive win in race one.

The pair fought for much of the following encounter, until Knibbs lost second to Oliver Allwood after a great battle through Sunny. The time Allwood lost securing the position allowed Brewer to win by more than two seconds.

Securing his hat-trick was anything but comfortable. With a heavy rain shower before the start, Brewer's pre-race decision

to go for stiffer suspension on his Mk1 MX-5 set him up for a difficult race as he tried to fend off a hard-charging Steve Foden.

Foden looked to have secured the lead on the last lap as he went past Brewer on the outside of the left-hander at the start of the Complex but, as the track swung right, Brewer utilised the grippier line to nose ahead going into the hairpin. His better exit gave him a slender speed advantage on their drag to the line.

"I knew I'd gel with this circuit quite well because it suits my strengths, but I didn't think I'd gel this quickly," said Brewer. "I've done all weathers this weekend, dry on Saturday and then damp and wet for the last two races. From never winning, to having pole, fastest laps and three wins – I wish Silverstone [the next round] was tomorrow!"

There was a first-time winner in the Fiesta Junior Championship too, as Jamsport racer Deagen Fairclough

took both wins on his series debut.

He showed remarkable racecraft in the opening race as – having lost a place to Jenson Brickley running side-by-side through the high-speed Jim Clark Esses – he shadowed his rival and pulled off a bold move on the inside of Hawthorn a lap later to take victory.

His second win was a true test of his wet-weather driving as a heavy downpour deluged the circuit. Launching off the line better than polesitter Alex Ley, Fairclough avoided the high-speed spins that caught out a number of his fellow racers at the Barcroft kink to cross the line ahead of Ley, who was busy defending from Sid Smith.

Patrick Fletcher twice held off Jack Harding to secure victories in the Mazda MX-5 Supercup. Having lost pace in qualifying due to a damaged catalytic converter, Harding twice charged up from the lower reaches of the top 10 to put pressure on Fletcher, but the latter proved too strong defensively to relinquish the top spot.

The partially grid reversed race three went the way of James Cossins – his first series victory. His success was aided by a three-way scrap for second between Harding, Michael Knibbs and reigning champion Sam Smith. Harding and Knibbs ran each other wide at the Complex allowing Smith to pick up two places, but he ran out of laps to chase down Cossins – the latter acknowledging that Knibbs' defensive driving allowed him to escape the clutches of the faster Smith.

Oliver Faller and Steven Dailly took a win apiece in the BMW Compact Cup. Faller took the first with outstanding defensive driving to keep four-time champion Dailly



Conditions were tricky in
Fiesta Junior race two, as
Fairclough took victory

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: READ

WEEKEND WINNERS

**MAZDA MX-5****Races 1, 2 & 3** Jack Brewer**FIESTA JUNIOR****Races 1 & 2** Deagen Fairclough**MAZDA MX-5 SUPERCUP****Races 1 & 2** Patrick Fletcher**Race 3** James Cossins**BMW COMPACT CUP****Race 1** Oliver Faller**Race 2** Steven Dailly (above)**ST-XR CHALLENGE****Races 1 & 2** Chris Jones (ST)**FIESTA CHAMPIONSHIP****Races 1 & 2** John Cooper (ST180)**CLUBSPORT TROPHY**

Jamie Going (Ford Fiesta ST, below)

MAZDA MX-5 CLUBMAN**Races 1 & 2** Harry StorerFor full results visit: tsl-timing.com

behind. The Scot struck back in the second, as a better start pulled him clear of Faller.

“Nailing” his first race start in his Ford Fiesta ST allowed Chris Jones to take the first of his two ST-XR Challenge victories on his Croft debut. A last-lap pass at Tower on the Fiesta XR2 of Simon Robinson in race two secured his clean sweep.

John Cooper took a pair of Fiesta wins as he managed rear-end damage and fended off Luke Pinder to take race-one success. His second triumph proved more comfortable as a slight mistake for Rob Smith exiting a soaking wet Tower allowed Cooper to pull clear.

A masterful drive from 31st and last after being a late entry secured Clubsport Trophy success for Fiesta racer Jamie Going, who passed Liam Crilly’s BMW Z4 with six of the 45 minutes remaining.

JOE HUDSON

FROM THE DRIVER’S SEAT TO TEAM OWNER

It was an encouraging start for MX-5 Supercup ace Herbert’s team



After narrowly missing out on a fourth consecutive Mazda MX-5 Supercup title last year, Luke Herbert could be expected to be even more determined to make it a quartet of crowns in 2021.

And, while he is eager to win more titles, he won’t be behind the wheel as he’s hung up his helmet and started a team to share his vast experience.

Compiling a three-car squad for the 2021 MX-5 Supercup, Herbert is aiming to replicate his racing glory as a team owner by sharing the knowledge that has allowed him stand out as one of the most successful one-make racers in recent years.

“I’ve worked hard to get where I’ve got to, I won the Ma5da Championship in 2012, Michelin Clios in 2015 and then won the Supercup in 2017, 2018 and 2019,” he said. “I’ve always liked helping people, so I felt that, after doing lots of seasons and achieving what I’ve wanted to achieve, I wanted to help other people get to where I am. So we’ve got all this set up and taken a step back from the driving. I wanted to keep my hand in, so the best way to do that was run a team!”

Herbert conceived the idea to start his own team last year, and Citroen C1 racer Tom Seldon and racing newcomer

Leigh Britten joined over the winter, while series frontrunner Jack Harding arrived on the morning of the first round – moving across from another squad.

Herbert explained: “I sort of put my name out there at the end of last year. I was trying to promote myself at Brands Hatch at the last round but unfortunately, I ended up in hospital with a bit of a crash.

“But in the winter, I’ve had two guys which haven’t been involved in the championship come forward and approach me so it just shows that my name is getting out there and people have heard of me.

“It’s nice to know that people know who I am, and now for Jack to come and join the team – we were arch-rivals at one point and now we’re working together.”

For Britten, who made his motorsport debut at Croft having decided to make the step up from sim racing, Herbert’s pedigree was one of the main factors for signing up with him.

“I looked at all the teams and I saw who was winning the championships,” he said. “I called quite a few teams and I really liked Luke just chatting to him – and he was winning, so it was a no-brainer for me.

“I thought, if he can set up a car and give a race-winning car, then all I need to do is focus on me.”

Despite a successful start to his new venture – with Harding picking up three podiums – Herbert is taking it one step at a time.

“Some of these guys might want to progress and stick with us, so we’ll see where it takes us,” he added. “It’s only the first year, it’s our first weekend. So far – touch wood – it’s all gone well.”

JOE HUDSON

Herbert (r) with former arch-rival Harding



It was three-wide for the lead early on, with Masters (10) leading Hair (mainly hidden) and Richings (47)

WALKER

Clubmans ace Masters the conditions for opening win

SILVERSTONE
MSVR
15-16 MAY

A large grid, changeable conditions and the overtaking opportunities of the Silverstone National circuit combined to create some action-packed Clubmans Sports Prototype racing as MotorSport Vision Racing made its first 2021 trip to Northamptonshire.

A massive 32-car entry was assembled – believed to be the largest in almost 20 years – and it was Pete Richings who initially led the way in the opener. But his advantage did not last long as he spun when the leaders ran three abreast into Brooklands on lap two, his slick tyres not giving quite enough grip on the drying surface.

That enabled Paul Masters to grab the lead, before Jonty Hair's Beagle, which was making a first appearance since 2017, swooped to the front at Copse. But he too was caught out by the conditions, spinning into the barriers exiting Luffield two laps from home.

"I was in the lead and the car was great – I was driving at seven tenths," said Hair. "I came round Luffield and there were a lot of backmarkers on the

outside and one started to slide and move inwards. I took avoiding action and ended up spinning."

Masters therefore secured top spot, but his second contest was a brief one. Richings was collected from behind on the run to Copse, which sent him into the path of Masters, who was forced out with damage. This left Steve Dickens in a clear lead, which he kept throughout.

The finale featured the best battle as Dickens and Clive Wood ran side by side on multiple occasions, and it was Wood who prevailed as Richings surged from 14th to fourth.

Another strong entry was attracted for the Jim Walsh Trophy and Heritage Formula Ford contests. Walter Hayes Trophy winner Oliver White (Medinasport) resisted everything Alex Walker (Spectrum) and Max Esterson (Ray) could throw at him in the opener, but was caught up in a tangle with Walker at Copse early in the Trophy race.

This left Esterson tussling with the Spectrum of Tom Mills, and the American eventually edged ahead across the startline with five laps to go, Esterson delighted to win as he still has not had much running in damp conditions. Top Heritage driver Matt Rivett's Van Diemen RF91 starred against more modern machinery, taking fifth overall.

Faster single-seater action came courtesy of the F3 Cup, and reigning champion Stefano Leaney broke the category's lap record (setting a best of 50.270s) en route to three victories. Leaney lost out to sportscar racer and former F3 ace James Winslow initially each time, but soon powered ahead to take comfortable wins.

Scott Parkin was another driver to bag a hat-trick, despite his event getting off on the wrong foot. He almost missed the Focus Cup opener,

which started half an hour early, and had to enter from the pitlane. But that did not hold him back, as he stormed through to third before winning race two, adding to his VW Golf victories in the Trackday Championship and Trackday Trophy (with brother Ryan). An "ecstatic" Charlie Barre claimed the first Focus spoils after runaway leader Simon Rudd had a turbo failure.

Danny Winstanley and Jason McNulty were the class of the Elise Trophy field and bagged a win apiece. McNulty was hounding Winstanley when he had a moment at Copse in the opener, but the corner was the scene of McNulty's winning pass in race two.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

WEEKEND WINNERS

CLUBMANS SPORTS PROTOTYPES

Race 1 Paul Masters (Mallock Mk20)

Race 2 Steve Dickens (Mallock Mk29)

Race 3 Clive Wood (Mallock Mk23)

JIM WALSH TROPHY & HERITAGE FORMULA FORD

Race 1 Oliver White (Medinasport JL17)

Race 2 Max Esterson (Ray GR18)

F3 CUP

Races 1, 2 & 3 Stefano Leaney (Dallara F317)

FOCUS CUP

Race 1 Charlie Barre

Race 2 Scott Parkin

TRACKDAY CHAMPIONSHIP

Scott Parkin (VW Golf)

TRACKDAY TROPHY

Ryan Parkin/Scott Parkin (VW Golf)

ELISE TROPHY

Race 1 Danny Winstanley (Elise S1)

Race 2: Jason McNulty (Elise S3)

ECURIE CLASSIC RACING

Andrew Colebrooke (Triumph TR4)

ALLCOMERS

Races 1 & 2: Tony Bennett (Caterham R300)

For full results visit: tsl-timing.com

Parkin secured a hat-trick of wins, including Focus Cup glory



Menzies off to a champion start at Loton Park

**LOTON PARK
BRITISH HILLCLIMB
15-16 MAY**

Wallace Menzies was the toast of the British Hillclimb Championship at Loton Park on Sunday when he won both championship run-offs to take a perfect score as the 2021 season got under way.

The reigning champion sat out 2020 completely when COVID-19 cancelled the championship, but showed he had lost none of his spark during the enforced lay-off, and pulled out two stunning runs up the Shropshire hill to make the perfect start to his title defence.

In the first run-off, ever-changing conditions as the track continued to dry played into Menzies's hands, with his Gould the last car to run. A blistering climb in 44.11s edged Alex Summers's DJ Firestorm by a third of a second, with six-time champion Scott Moran making it two Goulds in the top three with a 45.17s climb.

"You had to drive it like it was full dry," said Menzies, despite the track still harbouring some slightly damp patches under the trees. "We were concerned about rain coming because the temperature had dropped." His 44.11s was a great run and put down an emphatic early marker that the man from Alloa would like to keep number 1 on his car.

Sean Gould never made it into the first run-off after spinning his Gould at Keepers in the opening class runs. Damage was limited to a wing endplate and he was back out for the afternoon seeking to salvage some early points. "Just pushing on too much," said Gould of the spin. Richard Spedding never got going at all, with an electrical gremlin leaving his team unable to get his GWR Raptor running.

At the end of the afternoon, dark rain



There was no rustiness from Menzies as he began the year with a double win

LAWRENCE

clouds circled the parkland venue, but the track stayed dry for the second run-off. Once again, Menzies was the fastest qualifier from the class runs, and therefore the last to go in what would be the final run of a long day.

The pressure was on because immediately before Menzies, hill record holder Gould had put down a 44.27s. But Menzies dug deep and turned in a stunning run in 43.55s to score an emphatic victory and get within a quarter of a second of Gould's 2019 record. To seal second place in the second run-off was some compensation for Gould after his earlier disappointment.

Summers had a strong weekend to start a serious title bid with a second and a third. In the late afternoon second run-off, the Cosworth-powered DJ Firestorm was 0.05s behind Gould and 0.22s up on the charging Will Hall, who was an excellent fourth in both run-offs in his Force.

Moran backed up his earlier third with fifth, while Trevor Willis, fifth in the morning despite having to come out of the throttle during a big slide at Keepers, dropped to sixth with a run that included a moment at Triangle. With seventh and

eighth places, the flying Eynon Price headed the smaller-engined cars with two typically committed runs in his 1600cc Force.

"That's a cracking start to the season," said Menzies. "But we were very lucky today as running later in the batch helped with the weather in the morning. I'm just happy it stayed dry for everybody this afternoon and that made it a bit fairer. The boys worked really hard to get the car where it is. It's not always like that so we'll take it when it comes and enjoy it!"

PAUL LAWRENCE

LOTON PARK RESULTS

ROUND 1

1 Wallace Menzies (3.3 Gould-Cosworth GR59M) 44.11s; 2 Alex Summers (2.65 DJ Firestorm-Cosworth) 44.45s; 3 Scott Moran (4.0 Gould-Judd GR59J) 45.17s; 4 Will Hall (2.0t Force-Xtec) 45.41s; 5 Trevor Willis (3.2 OMS-RTE 28) 45.62s; 6 David Uren (3.5 Gould-Nicholson McLaren GR55B) 45.95s; 7 Eynon Price (1.6 Force-Hayabusa TA) 46.57s; 8 Graham Wynn (4.0 Gould-Judd GR59J) 48.75s; 9 Andrew Coley (2.5 Gould-Cosworth GR55) 49.81s; 10 Adam Greenen (1.1 Empire-Hayabusa Evo2) 49.83s.

ROUND 2

1 Menzies 43.55s; 2 Sean Gould (4.0 Gould-Judd GR59JB) 44.27s; 3 Summers 44.32s; 4 Hall 44.54s; 5 Moran 45.09s; 6 Willis 45.49s; 7 Uren 45.64s; 8 Price 47.13s; 9 Ben Stephenson (1.3s Empire-Hayabusa Evo 2) 48.58s; 10 Coley 49.22s.

POINTS

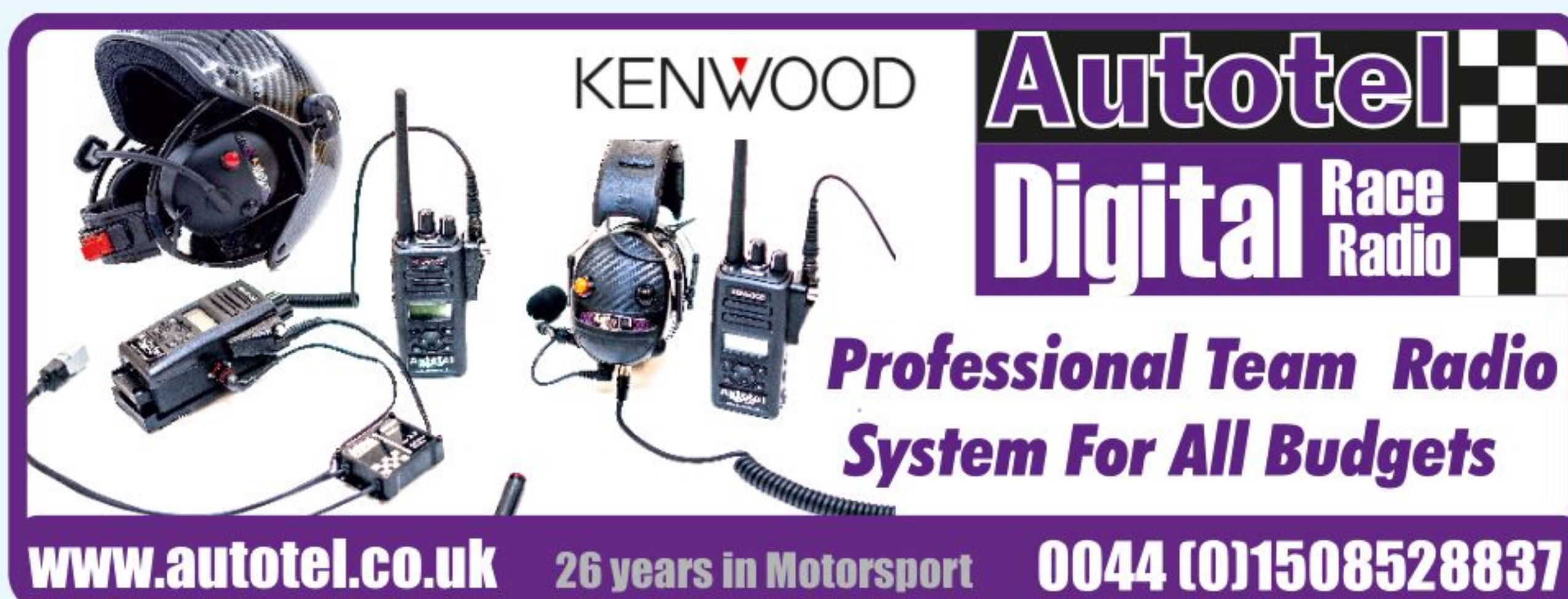
1 Menzies 20; 2 Summers 17; 3 Hall and Moran 14; 5 Willis 11; 6 Gould and Uren 9; 8 Price 7; 9 Coley and Wynn 3.



Summers's DJ Firestorm prevented an all-Gould podium

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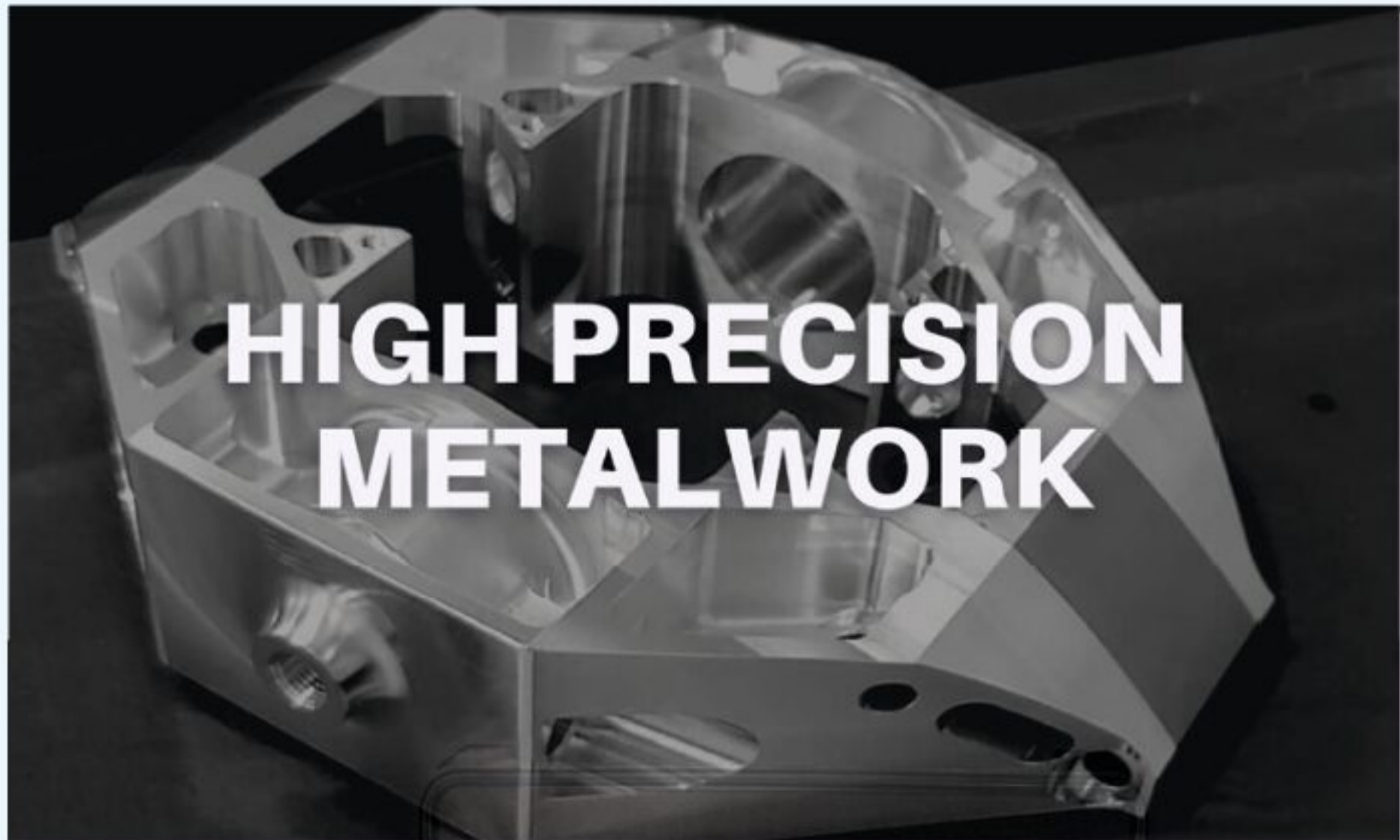


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- Supporting the Logistics Manager in event preparation and planning for F1/F2/F3
- Maintaining strong communication with the warehouse and supply chain to ensure proper information flow, regarding the return of tyres, return of equipment, shipments to events and ensuring communications to relevant departments in a timely manner
- SAP processes including data input, monitoring and managing the flows/transactions as per instructions in line with warehouse and trackside records
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FINISHING STRAIGHT

IN THE MEDIA • ARCHIVE • WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN



A WELCOME RETURN TO FREE-TO-AIR

TV COVERAGE MOTOGP ON ITV4

Even by MotoGP's standards, last weekend's French Grand Prix was incredibly wild thanks to a mid-race downpour that forced riders to swap bikes in a rare flag-to-flag affair. As ever with motorcycle racing's premier class, it didn't disappoint, and neither did the supporting Moto2 and Moto3 races, which had their usual close battles and plenty of thrills and spills.

Given the sensational racing, that fully justified the fact that the Le Mans Bugatti circuit event was the first MotoGP round to be shown live in the UK on free-to-air television since the end of 2013.

In much the same way that Sky Sports has a hold over Formula 1, so too has BT Sport on MotoGP. It has had exclusive rights to televise the championship since 2014, with an agreement in place until 2024. But all that changed last weekend. An agreement between MotoGP promoter Dorna Sports and ITV allowed for the French event to be shown live and in its entirety on ITV4, making for more than five hours of coverage on Sunday.

For UK fans not wishing to part with a significant amount of money, it was welcome news, and no doubt the viewing figures were substantially higher because of the decision, which Dorna has dubbed a "big step".

The coverage was taken from Dorna's world feed, found on its own subscription video pass service. And while there was no Suzi Perry fronting the programme



GOLDAND GOOSE/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Post-race interviews are
a part of world feed

from a London studio, or insight from 2003 World Superbike champion Neil Hodgson as on BT Sport, that certainly didn't matter. The world feed was more than up to the task, with Steve Day and Matt Birt bouncing off each other in the commentary box and providing plenty of knowledge and insight, likely appealing not only to hardcore fans but also those new to the sport.

With ex-rider Simon Crafar offering updates from the pitlane and conducting face-to-face post-race interviews (an area in which even BT Sport has been restricted due to COVID-19), everything was covered.



GOLD AND GOOSE
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IMAGES

As for the race, there was no shortage of information being thrown at fans. The position tower down the left-hand side is a common sight now in F1, but has been a staple feature of MotoGP coverage for even longer. A plethora of other graphics highlighting when a rider has fallen, messages sent to them from their team, and race direction announcements all help to keep the viewers abreast of almost every aspect of a race.

Getting to view live the incredibly low heart rate of Fabio Quartararo was a different but welcome insight, as was the footage from a GoPro strapped to the front of a marshal as they sprinted across the gravel to help a fallen rider. For non-regular viewers, it's a breath of fresh air compared with other motorsport coverage.

As for content missing... Yes, it would have been good to have a mini feature or exclusive interview prior to the race to break up the monotony of seeing riders walking from their motorhomes or sitting in garages until making their way to the grid. But this was to be expected, and certainly not a make-or-break aspect of the coverage.

There's more good news for MotoGP fans, with the British Grand Prix also set to be shown live on ITV's main channel on 29 August. It remains to be seen whether there will be any bespoke coverage from ITV or if it will be solely the world feed coverage again. But even if it's the latter, viewers are in for a treat, and the fact that live motorsport is once again more widely accessible, even for a short time, can only be a good thing.

STEFAN MACKLEY

WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Monaco Grand Prix

Formula 1 World Championship Round 5/23

Monte Carlo, Monaco

23 May

TV Live Sky Sports F1, Sun 1355

TV Highlights

Sky Sports F1, Sun 2130, Channel 4, Sun 1830

FIA Formula 2

Round 2/8

Monte Carlo, Monaco

21-22 May

TV Live Sky Sports F1, Fri 1035, Sat 0710, 1405

Formula Regional European by Alpine

Round 3/10

Monte Carlo, Monaco

22-23 May

Porsche Supercup

Round 1/8

Monte Carlo, Monaco

23 May

TV Live Eurosport 1, Sun 0915, Sky Sports F1, Sun 0930

Rally Portugal

World Rally Championship Round 4/12

Matosinhos, Portugal

20-23 May

TV Live BT Sport 1, Fri

1430, Sat 1900, Sun 0830, BT Sport 2, Fri 1900, BT Sport 3, Sat 0800, Sat 1430, BT Sport ESPN, Sun 1200

TV Highlights

BT Sport 3, Fri 2300, Sun 0130, Sun 2030, Red Bull TV, Fri 2200, Sat 2220, Sun 2200, ITV4, Wed 2000

NASCAR Cup Series

Round 14/36

Circuit of The Americas, USA

23 May

TV Live Premier Sports 2, Sun 1900

NASCAR Xfinity Series

Round 11/33

Circuit of The Americas, USA

22 May

NASCAR Truck Series

Round 9/22

Circuit of The Americas, USA

22 May

UK MOTORSPORT

Oulton Park MGCC

22 May

BCV8s, Cockshoot Cup, Equipe GTS, Equipe Libre, Equipe Pre-'63/50s, Metro Cup, MG Cup, MG Trophy

Cadwell Park MSVR

22 May

EnduroKa

Mallory Park BRSCC

22 May

Caterham Academy, Northern FF1600/Super Classic, Superkarts, Track Attack

Brands Hatch GP MSVR

22-23 May

British F3, British GT, Ginetta GT5 Challenge/G40 Cup, Ginetta GT Academy, Porsche Sprint Challenge, Tin Tops

Silverstone GP HSCC

22-23 May

'70s Roadsports/'80s Production Challenge, Aurora/Geoff Lees Trophy, Classic F3, GT & Sports Car Cup, Guards Trophy, Historic F2, Historic FF1600, Historic Roadsports, Saloon Car Cup/Historic Touring Cars, Thunder Sports

Donington Park 750MC

22-23 May

116 Trophy, 750 Formula, Alfa Romeos, BMW Car Club, Classic Stock Hatch, Clio 182s, F1000, Historic 750F, Hot Hatch, Ma7das, MR2s, Sports 1000



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FROM THE ARCHIVE

Mike Parkes is forced to get down and dirty, employing deft spadework from a prone position in an eventually successful bid to extricate his Ferrari 330 LMB (effectively an updated 250

GTO with a four-litre V12 engine) from the Mulsanne Corner sandbank during the 1962 Le Mans 24 Hours. Parkes, who shared his works car with Lorenzo Bandini, had come off worse after vying for the lead with Graham

Hill's Aston Martin DP212 on the opening lap. Parkes was eight laps down by the time he recovered to the pits, but overheating due to radiator damage curtailed the car's pace and it was retired seven hours in.



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WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

When a career-changing move goes begging

JORG MULLER IN INDYCARS

It's a curious historical anomaly that, of the international superstars who've tried their luck in Indycars, German drivers have made a negligible impression. Timo Glock is the only driver to emerge from the nation's motorsport ladder to score a podium (at Montreal in 2005), with such talents as Michael Krumm, Andre Lotterer and Lucas Luhr limited to fleeting cameos. Yet the complexion of the discussion might have been different had Jorg Muller taken the leap to Indycars and not the American Le Mans Series.

Fresh from winning the 1996 International Formula 3000 title, Muller was pitched against Tom Kristensen, Allan McNish and Patrick Carpentier at Sebring in a shootout for Bettenhausen Motorsports. Carpentier got the drive, while Muller, unhappy with the feel of the brakes but not permitted set-up changes, ended up in the wall. But he says this had no bearing on his decision not to take a drive with an unnamed team for 1998, having been distinctly unimpressed when he arrived for a test at Homestead.

"They put some soft foam on the side of my seat and said, 'Can you drive like that?'" says Muller, still a regular in NLS

races on the Nordschleife. "I thought, 'I'm not going 400km/h on an oval, where every little bit is so important that you don't risk your life, with some soft foam on the side.' I was sitting like a brick in that car! So I called Dr [Helmut] Marko [Muller's mentor] and said, 'I'm coming home, I'm not doing that.'"

Instead, he focused on sportscars, finishing second at Le Mans with Porsche in 1998 and winning the Sebring 12 Hours with BMW in 1999. Muller also turned down a Bettenhausen drive for 2001 and won the ALMS GT title instead, before becoming a stalwart of BMW's Super 2000 touring car and GT programmes. Today, Muller maintains he doesn't regret never racing in Indycars.

"I drove in America for a few years in the ALMS and I really liked the country, but the chances I got [in Indycars] were not professional enough for me," he says. "I never wanted to fill a field; I wanted to win and fight with other competitors, but my experiences there were not that good. There are no regrets. I enjoyed every time I sat in a race car. I never raced in Formula 1, but I've had a fantastic career."

JAMES NEWBOLD



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